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HARLEY GREENOAK'S CHARGE

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BY.

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"THE GUN-RUNNER," "THE KING'S ASSEGAI," "THE TRIUMPH OF HILARY BLACHLAND," "A SECRET OF THE LEBOMBO," ETC.

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HARLEY GREENOAK'S CHARGE

CHAPTER I

THE OPENING OF THE COMPACT

"You will look after him, won't you?"

"Certainly. You can rely upon me absolutely."

Thus two men on the deck of a ship. One was silver-haired, elderly, spare and very refined looking. The other, of medium height, broadly built, and middle aged, was, in his way, of striking appearance. His strong face, lined and sun-tanned, was half hidden in a full, iron-grey beard, and the keen blue eyes with their straight glance, were of that kind which would be deadly looking at you from behind the sights of a rifle. His hands, rough and hard, were like his face, burnt almost to a mahogany brown, the result of forty-five years' exposure—man and boy—to the varying climates of the southern section of the African continent. And the first speaker was Sir Anson Selmes, Bart., and the second was Harley Greenoak,

hunter, prospector, native trader, native fighter, stock farmer, transport rider, and other things—all in turn. And as he plays an important part in some strange adventures which are to befall, we have dwelt somewhat at length upon his personal aspect. His character you shall discover for yourself.

"Rely upon you? I'm sure I can," went on Sir Anson, heartily. "And Dick has a boundless capacity for getting into scrapes of one kind or another. There's no vice in him, but he simply can't help it. You'll find him no sinecure, I'm afraid."

"Oh, as to that," answered Greenoak, easily, "we shall pull all right. You see, I've already been sizing him up to my own satisfaction or I wouldn't have undertaken to look after him."

"That I'm sure you wouldn't, Greenoak," laughed Sir Anson. "You're nothing if not decisive."

"I'm afraid a man gets rather blunt after leading a life like mine," said the other.

"I'm only too fortunate in getting hold of a man of your experience to look after the boy," rejoined the baronet, heartily. "Why, there he is."

The subject of their conversation burst upon them in his breezy way. He was a tall, fine young fellow of twenty-six, blue eyed, light haired, healthy, wholesome, athletic, and looking what he was—an English gentleman.

"Hallo, dad. What are you and Greenoak plotting

there? Why, you've been in earnest confab for at least an hour. What's the subject?"

"Yourself, Dick," answered his father. "You know I only took the run over here for the sake of the voyage, but now you're over you'd better see something of the country, and do a few months' knocking about with Greenoak. He has very kindly consented to look after you, only he little knows what a handful he's undertaking."

The young fellow's face lit up.

"Why, that'll be ripping." Then remembering—"But what about yourself, dad? I can't leave you to go back all alone."

"Oh, I'll be all right. Dawson'll look after me; as he has done almost ever since I've had the honour of your acquaintance. This is an opportunity though, which you can't afford to lose, so we can consider it settled. Eh, Greenoak?"

"That's right, Sir Anson," was the reply, as the speaker fished out a handful of black Transvaal tobacco, which he kept loose in his side pocket, and proceeded to cram his pipe.

"By George, what times we'll have!" sang out Dick, delightedly. "We'll yarn about it presently. Now I'm in the middle of a game of quoits with those Johnson women, and as they're about the touchiest crowd on board I shall get in a row if I keep them waiting any longer."

He strode away, whistling, leaving his seniors to their conversation. These two—the English baronet and the South African up-country man, had made acquaintance during the outward voyage, and had grown very friendly indeed. And the result of this newly formed friendship was that Sir Anson had begged Greenoak to take charge of the young fellow—in short to take him round a bit—in quite an informal sort of way.

Greenoak, although he had put by something during his varied and roving life, was by no means opulent, and had fully intended, on his return trip from England, to start up-country again at once in some capacity or other. This new line was something of a novelty to him, but it was a very welcome one, for Sir Anson Selmes had arranged it upon the most liberal terms. He had given him an absolutely free hand in the matter of expenses, and the honorarium which he was to receive was generous to a degree.

"You're very confiding, Sir Anson," Greenoak remarked in his queer blunt way. "How do you know I shan't rob you? Why, you're almost putting a premium on any man doing so under that agreement."

Still discussing the arrangement just concluded, the two were seated in deck chairs in the shade afforded by a boat slung inward on chocks. The voyage was nearly at an end. The ship had lain

three days in the Cape Town docks, and now was skirting Danger Point, with its lofty cliffs and treacherous archipelago of sunken reefs. There was a fine roll on, and every now and then the nose of the liner dipped deep into the green water, throwing up a seething splash of milky spume.

"Because," answered Sir Anson, "I know something of men, although my experience has been gained in a side of life totally different from your own. Apart from that, does it occur to you that you may not be entirely unknown to some of the passengers, and even, by repute, to the ship's officers? What if I may have heard it said, more than once, that Harley Greenoak's name is better than most men's witnessed signature?"

"Well, Sir Anson, I don't want to brag, but, since you put things that way, it has certainly always been as good," was the reply.

For a minute or two both men smoked on in silence, their gaze resting meditatively on the white lines of surf storming against the base of the iron cliffs at no great distance on the port beam. Then Greenoak said:

"I believe we can't be far from where the *Birkenhead* went down. In fact I shouldn't be surprised if this was the very spot."

"Let's hope not," rejoined Sir Anson. "I mean let's hope we're a little further out from land. But

it's interesting to be on it, and I'm glad you reminded me. By Jove, but that is a story which no Englishman could read or dwell upon without a thrill of pride; for I don't believe any other country could produce its parallel. Think of the splendid discipline of those heroic fellows—rank and file alike—drawn up as though on parade, staring death—certain death—straight in the face without a qualm, so that the women and children should be saved. Yet a few did manage to swim ashore, but it has always been a perfect miracle to me that they did. Now, looking at that surf yonder, it is, if possible, a still greater one."

"It wasn't only the surf and the rocks they had to reckon on," said Harley Greenoak. "These waters are simply swarming with sharks."

"Yes, one heard that at the time, which renders it still more miraculous that a single man jack of them should have escaped."

"I know a man who did. He's in the Police, and came out here as a youngster in the *Birkenhead*. He said men were dragged down on each side of him while they were swimming. I tell you what it is, Sir Anson—if I were offered half a million of money to swim ashore from here now, even with a boat a score of yards behind me, I'd say 'No thank you.' Of course a man is bound to 'go under' sooner or later, but I don't hanker after that method of doing so."

And the speaker, rising, went to the rail to knock the ashes out of his pipe.

"God bless my soul! What's that?" cried Sir Anson, half starting out of his chair.

For a cry rang out, sharp and clear—a cry which, next to that of "Fire," is the most thrilling of all to a floating community.

"Man overboard!"

A rush was made aft. The confusion and excitement among the passengers were indescribable. Men talked, women shrieked, and one fainted. And above this scene of terror and uproar, a tall figure, lightly clad, was seen to spring upon the taffrail. For just a second it stood poised, then with hands joined above the head, sprang far out in a splendid dive. And in that second the dismayed onlookers had time to make out the form of Dick Selmes.

At the sight a cheer broke forth, somewhat quavering, to be sure. Roughly charging through the crowd a quarter-master leapt aft, and with deft and powerful sweep of the arm hurled the lifebuoy in his hand far out and across the path of the swimmer. But the latter passed it unheeded. He required nothing to hamper his pace, as with a strong, swift side stroke he clove his way through and over the tumble of the waves. The "man overboard" was now seen to be a small boy, and he had already sunk twice. No, there was no time to be lost.

But even in that brief fraction of a minute Harley Greenoak had flung off his coat, and muttering, "He's bound to need help," had leaped upon the rail and sprung out into the sea, cleaving his way with no less powerful strokes to where the two were struggling.

Dick had reached the drowning boy, and was holding him up in firm athletic grasp, but there was a nasty choppy sea running, which, breaking into spume, both blinded and choked him. He was treading water now, as though to wait until the boat should be lowered. But Harley Greenoak had picked up the lifebuoy and was towing it towards the pair, whom in a few minutes he was seen to reach. Then something like a gasp of relief escaped the spectators. Those two powerful men, with the aid of the lifebuoy, should have no difficulty in keeping both themselves and their charge afloat until they were picked up. But there was one to whom this consideration brought little if any relief at all, and that one was Sir Anson Selmes.

The agony of the unhappy father was simply hideous to endure. The conversation of a minute or two back burnt into his brain like letters of fire. These waters were swarming with sharks, and had not Greenoak just declared that no consideration would tempt him to venture into the sea at this point. Yet hardly had the words left his mouth than he deliberately did that very thing. Even his

frenzied apprehension for the safety of his son could not dim a glow of admiration for this cool, brave man who had courted the ghastly death he himself had pronounced to be almost certain, when the object was the saving of life. Every second seemed an hour, every minute a week. Would they *never* lower that boat?

But the way on the steamer was far too great to allow of her being stopped at once, consequently she was being brought round to the submerged three, and although this could not be done all in a minute, it could be in far less time than that taken to pull a boat any distance in such a choppy sea.

Hurrah! The boat dropped from the davits, and went plashing through the waves as fast as sinew and muscle could send her.

"We're all jolly," bawled Dick Selmes, "only look sharp. It's beastly cold."

The words, audible to those on the ship, raised a laugh that rounded off into a mighty cheer, as the boat was seen to gain its objective and the three were hoisted in.

"Thirteen minutes from the time of going over the side," said the officer in charge of the ship, closing his watch with a snap. "Not bad time that, sir?"

"No. It's good," said the captain, who, half asleep in his cabin, had been roused by the uproar and had quickly ascended to the bridge.

"Drowned rat No. 1," sang out Dick Selmes, shoving the cause of all the bother in front of him, as they gained the deck. Then there was a great deal of hugging and kissing on the part of the mother, which was cut short by the decisive voice of the doctor, ordering the drenched and shivering boy to be taken below at once.

"Dick, you scoundrel, what do you mean by behaving like that?" exclaimed Sir Anson rather unsteadily, as he wrung the defaulter's hands again and again. "What d'you mean by it, sir? Ah, Greenoak, I told you you'd find him a handful, and he's lost no time in backing up what I said. And you—— Why, man, after what you were just telling me—swarming with sharks, eh? Heroic—that's what it is. You're a hero, sir—both heroes—and——"

"I say, dad," interrupted Dick, quizzically, "let's have the speech later. We want to go and change and get something hot. I swear *I* do."

This raised a great laugh among the lookers on, tailing off into a cheer, in the midst of which the dripping ones disappeared in the companion way, followed by Sir Anson.

CHAPTER II

A BEGINNING

"GOOD-BYE, Greenoak."

"Good-bye, Sir Anson."

"No need to repeat my absolute confidence in leaving him in your hands," went on the latter. "You've already begun by saving his life."

"Oh, as to that I only helped him. He'd have been all right anyhow," replied Greenoak. "And," he added, "you won't mind my reminding you of one agreement—that of that subject we have heard more than enough!"

"I agreed to nothing of the sort. It's a subject of which we could not hear enough! Well, Greenoak, when your wanderings with the boy are over, come back home with him and make a good long stay at our place, though we have nothing more ferocious to shoot than pheasants and hares. Is that a promise?"

"Delighted, Sir Anson."

The above conversation took place in the otherwise empty smoking-room of the Port Elizabeth Club. The old gentleman was returning to England that afternoon,

incidentally by the same liner that had brought them out. It would be more comfortable, he reckoned, than returning by a strange boat, and the sooner Dick set off on his travels the better; a theory, by the way, which was held by Dick even more firmly than by his father. The said Dick now put in his appearance.

"Time, dad," he said, comparing his watch with the mantelpiece clock. "The last launch, you know, and she won't wait. So come along."

"Good-bye again, Greenoak," said Sir Anson, as the two men heartily gripped hands. "And don't forget your promise."

"Good-bye to you, Sir Anson. And I won't."

So Dick and his father betook themselves to the landing-place, and Harley Greenoak betook himself to lunch. With characteristic judgment he had divined that father and son would prefer to be alone together at the last, and so had refrained from seeing the old gentleman off to the ship. Now as he sat in the club dining-room he was thinking, and his thoughts, needless to say, ran upon the charge he had just undertaken. To that end he was rather glad there was nobody he knew in the room.

Needless to say, too, that after the episode off Danger Point, which might so nearly have ended in tragedy, the tendency now among his fellow-passengers was to make very much of a hero of Dick Selmes, and more especially did this hold good of the "fair"

section thereof. It was as well, perhaps, decided Harley Greenoak, that only a day or two remained for the absorption of all this adulation. Towards himself the tendency was not so marked, for which he was unaffectedly glad. He had borne part in too many strange and perilous episodes in his time for one, more or less, to afflict him with "swelled head." It was all in the day's work.

Dick Selmes, of course, had plenty of invitations, and could have got through six months easily before he had run through them all. But not to this end had he been placed in charge of Harley Greenoak. The latter meant him to see something of the hard and adventurous life of the country, even of its perils, and this Dick could scarcely effect by pleasant stays at this or that comfortable stock farm, with sport made easy; perchance, too, flirting like the mischief with this or that pretty daughter of his host *pro tem.* All of which Greenoak had put to him square and straight, and Dick Selmes had whole-heartedly agreed.

"I don't want to fool about, old chap," he had said, "I want to see something of the real thing."

"Thought you would, Dick," had been the answer. "Well, I see we're going to make a real up-country man of you before we've done."

Thinking over these things Greenoak sat. Then deciding that Dick would be returning from the ship about now, he concluded to stroll down and meet him.

He left the club. From the steep hill leading down to Main Street there was a view of the bay and the shipping, the homeward-bound liner flying the blue peter and sending up a thickening volume of smoke, while away behind the Winterhoek mountains rose soft and hazy against the unclouded sky.

"Hi!—hallo, Greenoak," and a hand dropped on his shoulder from behind; but he did not start, his nerves were in far too good training for that. He only stopped.

"That you, Simcox? How are you?"

The man thus addressed was about Greenoak's own age, hard, wiry, weatherbeaten. A typical colonist of the downright rough-and-ready type. Now he exclaimed:

"Well, this is a surprise. And what brings you down here?"

The other told him.

"Rum thing, isn't it," he said with a laugh, "that at my time of life I should start out in the bear-leading line? Well, this is a particularly nice young chap, so that the job's likely to turn out 'clovery' all round."

"So?" said Simcox. "Why not bring him out to my place. We could get up a hunt or two, if he's fond of sport."

The very thing, decided Greenoak. The question of

how and where to make a start was solved. So he answered:

"He just is. Well then, Simcox, thanks awfully, and we'll come. When?"

"Now. To-morrow morning."

"But we've got no horses."

"I can drive you out—that is, if that young Britisher can do without top-hats and swallow-tail suits. No room in the cart for all that sort of thing."

"He'll have to. Why, here he comes. This is an old friend of mine, Dick," he went on, introducing them. "He's got a farm out on the borders of the Addo Bush, and we're going out there with him to-morrow to do a little hunting. How's that?"

"Ripping," answered Dick, brightening up, for he had been a little "down" after his recent farewell. "Perfectly, absolutely ripping."

"We're a bit rough and tumble out at our place, you know," said the stock farmer, who was appraising his guest-elect. "No champagne and cigars and all that sort of thing. Eh, Greenoak?"

The latter nodded.

"I don't expect or want luxuries, Mr. Simcox," answered Dick. "Shall I tell you what I do want?"

"What?"

"To shoot as many of your bucks and things as I can."

"You're heartily welcome to."

And Simcox laughed good-naturedly, and opined that Greenoak's "bear-leading" would be no very trying job after all.

"He'll do," he pronounced, with an approving nod towards the young fellow.

CHAPTER III

THE TERROR OF THE ADDO

Simcox's farm, Buffels Draai, comprised about as wild a tract of bush country as exists, although not many hours' ride or drive from the busiest of Cape Colony towns. Before Dick Selmes had been in the house two hours he had completely won the hearts of Mrs. Simcox and the two grown-up nice, plain, homely girls, but blessed with no particular outward attractions; while Simcox himself pronounced him, when out of his hearing, as nice a young fellow as he had ever run against. Before he had been in the house two weeks he had shot many bush-bucks, and other unconsidered trifles, and knew his way all about the place. He took a vivid interest in everything, and imbibed veldt-craft with an adaptability which surprised his host and Harley Greenoak. Likewise he had learned what an astonishing number of things he could do without, together with what an astonishing number of things he could do for himself.

Just about that time they were seated out on the stoep one evening, talking over a projected bush-buck

hunt, when there arose a sudden and terrific clamour from the dogs lying around the house. These sprang up, and rushed, barking and growling furiously, towards the nearest bush line.

"*Magtig!*" exclaimed Simcox. "Wonder if those infernal half-tame elephants are going to give us a look round? The dogs are more than ordinarily excited."

"Tame?" said Dick, inquiringly, as they stood up to gaze in the direction of the hubbub.

"Well, they're just tame enough to be *schelm* and do a heap of mischief, otherwise they're wild enough. There are buffalo too, but there is no tameness about them. They generally stick away in the thicker thorns on the other side of the bush. Here, let's go over and see what's up."

They got a gun apiece and set forth. The cause of the racket was soon revealed, and it took the form of a badly-scared old Hottentot, who had fortunately found a handy tree. The dogs were driven off, and even as they took him to the house he told his story, and a tragical story it was. A buffalo had killed Jan Bruintjes, the boy who brought the mail-bags from the local post-office. The narrator and he were walking along the road, when an enormous buffalo bull rushed out of the bush and caught Jan on its horns, flung him into the air, and when he fell, ripped and gored him again and again. Dead? Oh, he was so torn as to be hardly recognizable. He himself had

hidden, and then, when the beast had gone, went back to look at his friend. Where did it happen? About half an hour from the house, where the road made a bend towards Krantz Hoek. He had come straight to tell Baas Simcox.

"Well, we can't do anything to-night," declared the latter. "First thing in the morning, I'll go round and investigate. I wonder if that's the brute that chevied the Alexandria post cart last year? The driver tootled his horn, but it had the opposite effect intended. The horses bolted and upset the cart against a tree. The driver was killed—not in the same way—gored to death. In fact this brute is suspected of having done for half a dozen in all, and it's very likely true. He set up a perfect scare at one time, like an Indian man-eater would."

"They must be a jolly nuisance," said Dick. "If I lived here I'd jolly well thin them down."

"Would you? Fine of £100 a head. They're strictly preserved."

"Well, it's a beastly shame."

"So it is," said Harley Greenoak. "But buffalo rank first among game called dangerous, especially in country like this." And he told a yarn or two to bear out his statement.

One yarn led to another, and it was rather later than usual when they went to bed.

The story he had just heard fired Dick Selmes'

imagination to such an extent that when he got to his room he felt it was impossible to go to sleep or even to turn in. He hung out of his open window, and in the sombre shadow of the depths of the moonlit bush, seemed to see the whole horrid tragedy re-enacted. The boom of night-flying beetles, the chirp of the tree-frog, the whistle of plover, now invisible overhead, now lighting on the ground in darting white spots, were all to him as the poetic voices of the weirder night which could contain such tragical possibilities: and it seemed that each ghostly sound—whether of mysterious rustling, or the clatter of a stone—heralded the appearance of the terrible beast, pacing forth into the open, its wicked, massive horns still smeared with the unfortunate man's blood. Then an idea struck him—struck him between the eyes, so to speak—for it was a momentous one. What if he——?

He got out his double gun, slipped a Martini cartridge into the rifle breech, a heavy charge of loepers into the smoothbore, and two or three spare ones into his pocket. The window was only his own height from the ground. Out of this he dropped quietly, so as not to rouse the house.

But he reckoned without the dogs. Those faithful animals immediately sprang up, and from all directions came for him open-mouthed. They knew him well enough to quiet their clamour almost immediately, but even then their delighted whining at the prospect of a

nocturnal hunt was almost as noisy. But he had to drive them back, even with stones. Then he struck into the darkest shades of the bush, relieved that the clamour had apparently aroused no one.

How glad he felt that he knew his way about fairly well by this time! In the bright moonlight he had no difficulty whatever in finding it. Yet every stealthy sound set his heart wildly beating, and he carried his gun at full cock. Ah, here was the place.

The white riband of road snaked away in the moonlight—and—here was the spot. Yes, the huge hoof-marks were plain, and the signs in the dust of a sudden scuffle; and there were two of the leathern letter-bags carried by the unfortunate man lying by the roadside, and then—Dick Selmes, for all his pluck, for all his ambition, and the adventurous excitement that had swayed him, felt quite sick. For, lying there by the roadside, torn, horribly mangled, was the body of the unfortunate victim itself.

But somehow the sight, horrible though it was, roused in him a fierce longing for retribution. If he could but find the slayer! Yet, why not? He had no dogs to give the miscreant warning of his approach, and if it did "wind" him, in its present mood, why, it would not be the one of the two the most eager to vanish. He tried hard to follow the spoor; and up to a certain distance succeeded, then it got lost in the shadows of the bush. Even then he would not give

up. He had the whole night before him, and—if he should return in the morning triumphant? The very thought acted like a spur.

Moving cautiously, his weapon cocked and ready, he was compelled to move slowly. And now every sound intensified itself tenfold, and once a bush-buck, undisturbed by his silent advance until he was close upon it, sprang up and bounded away with a rustle that made him think it could be nothing less than the gigantic destroyer itself.

Now he could not be far from the spot, he decided. Yes. Here was Krantz Hoek. There was the row of straight-stemmed euphorbia, pluming the crescent of the cliff, just as described by the old Hottentot. The bush around was mainly *spekboem* and mimosa, not growing tall, in fact scarcely higher than his head, and in some places not that. He began to feel conscious of a consuming thirst, but this was dry country and dry weather, so there was no remedy for that. He began to feel something else—to wit that he had been a fool to come, and somehow all the excitement and anticipation began to evaporate, and the process of evaporation seemed to progress with quite extraordinary rapidity. And then—and then—just as he had fully made up his mind to retrace his steps—if he could—a sudden clink and rattle of stones set him wide on the alert—and—Heavens! what was this?

Seeming to rise out of the ground, something huge

and black rose up in the moonlight. There it stood, the terrible beast, the manslayer, gigantic in its might, and for a moment the spectator stood petrified. This then was what he had come out to find, he in his puniness! The curved horns gleamed viciously, the fierce head with its mail-clad frontlet moved to and fro, the dilated nostrils sniffing the air as though scenting the presence of an enemy.

It was a nerve-trying sight, and the startling suddenness of the apparition rendered it more so. 'Dick Selmes' nerves were sound and in good training, yet the thought that here he was, alone with this monster, certain death before him if he failed to kill at the first shot, might well have unsteadied him. The great bull was standing turned sideways, and did not seem actually to have seen him. By slowly sinking down behind the bush he might still escape.

But escape was not what he had come out for. He had come out to kill, and that to his own hand. So aiming carefully where he thought the heart should be, he pressed the trigger.

The effect was startling. There was a snort and then a series of savage bellowings rent the night. The huge, grisly head was tossed from side to side and the white foam poured from the open mouth. Quickly Dick Selmes slipped another cartridge into the rifle breech, but before he could so much as bring

the piece to his shoulder the brute sighted him, and came straight for him.

In a flash Dick realized that there was nothing to aim at but the mail-clad head. He turned and ran, and as he ran, the dictum of Harley Greenoak as to the buffalo holding first rank among dangerous game, and held in greater respect than any by old hunters, leapt through his mind. And he in his rawness had come out to tackle this terror single-handed, and at night. The thunder of his huge pursuer shook the ground beneath him, the savage growling bellow of its appalling voice was in his ears, the vision of its mangled victim in his brain. It was upon him. Then he missed his footing and fell—shot head first into a large ant-bear hole, which yawned suddenly at his feet.

Nothing else on this earth could have saved him. He felt the vibration as that vast bulk thundered past, and wormed himself with a mighty effort still further in, not without fears that those dreadful horns might still contrive to dig their way to him.

Suddenly the din ceased, but what was this? In front of him, in the black darkness something growled.

It was not the original excavator of the hole, he knew, for the ant-bear, which is not a "bear" at all but a timid and harmless beast, does not growl. Well, at any rate, as the destroyer seemed to have retreated, he had better retire as he had come, and leave this

most opportune hiding-place to its lawful owner. To that intent he made a move to draw back.

But even with that slight move the growl grew more prolonged, more vicious. And then Dick Selmes realized that the peril which he had just escaped was as nothing to the ghastly peril he was in now. *He could not withdraw.*

The hole slanted downwards at an angle of forty-five, and even then it had required all the effort of despair to squeeze himself in where it narrowed. But to do this from above was one thing, to squeeze himself up again, and that backwards, was another. *He could not do it.*

The blood, all run to his head, seemed to burst his brain, and the perspiration streamed from every pore, as his most violent and powerful efforts failed to release him by a single inch. He was imprisoned by where the tunnel narrowed over his legs. If he could have got at his knife he might have done something, but his hands and arms were extended straight out in front of him, nor could he draw them back. *He had performed his own funeral.*

Who would know where to look for him? Even if he were found, it might not be for days, and by that time it would be too late. He had entombed himself, and a few yards in front of him some savage beast was growling in the pitch darkness—some beast, cowardly it might be in itself, but whose lair he was

blocking, and which, realizing his utter helplessness, would speedily attack him, and gnaw its way to freedom *through him.* Small wonder that an awful terror should freeze his every faculty.

What the creature might be he had no very definite idea. It was not a leopard, or it would have attacked him sooner. It was probably a hyæna or wild dog—both timid of mankind in the open, but anything is formidable when cornered. The growls grew increasingly loud and menacing—they seemed to be drawing nearer too—and every moment the helpless man expected to feel the snapping fangs tearing at his face and head. Again he made a frantic effort, but utterly without avail. The suffocating atmosphere, together with the rush of the blood to the head owing to his position, was fast causing him to lose consciousness. He was in a place of darkness, being tormented by some raging demon. Surely this was death!

* * * * *

"That's better. Buck up. I thought you were a 'goner.'" And Harley Greenoak's voice had a ring of concern, as he bent over his charge.

"So did I," answered Dick, unsteadily, opening his eyes to the blessed air and light. "How did you get me out?"

"Man, I gripped you by the ankles, and just lugged. It was touch and go then, I can tell you."

"But how did you know where to find me?"

"When I hear a fellow like you get up when he ought to be going to bed—when I see him slope into the bush with a gun, after the yarn we've just heard to-night, it stands to reason he wants looking after. Dick, your dad spoke true when he told me you were fond of getting into holes."

"Well, if I hadn't got into that hole I should have been still more done," laughed Dick, at his own joke. And then he told the other about the buffalo.

"M' yes," said Greenoak, musingly. "You've got a hundred pounds to spare, I take it?"

"A hundred——" Then Dick broke off as a new light struck him. "Why, man, you don't mean to say I've turned over the bull?"

"Dead as a door-nail—and with one Martini bullet, too. He's lying just yonder. There's a hundred-pound fine, you know."

A ringing hurrah broke the calm stillness of the night.

"Then it's worth it," cried Dick. "By the way, there's something in that hole—a wolf or a wild dog."

"Oh," and the other cocked his rifle.

"No," said Dick, with a hand on his arm. "We'll let it off—as it let me off."

"We'll just have to finish the night here," said Greenoak; "that is, if you want that head to stick up in your ancestral halls, and it's jolly well worth it.

Otherwise the jackals and wild dogs'll mangle it out of all recognition before morning."

Dick readily agreed, and the two, collecting some dry wood, soon had a roaring fire under way.

"Why, this is your first camp, Dick," said Greenoak, reaching out a handful of tobacco for him to fill from, and then filling up himself.

"Rather," was the answer. "Oh, it's glorious—glorious," jumping up again to go and look at the mighty beast, lying there but a few yards off in the moonlight. Harley Greenoak laughed.

"He's all right. He won't run away," he said. "Nothing will touch him either while we are here. Better go to sleep."

"Not much sleep for me to-night. No fear," said Dick.

And he was right. The excitement, the keen fresh air, the sights and sounds of the surrounding forest were too much for this ardent young novice, and he hardly closed his eyes. Yet in the morning he was none the worse.

The astonishment in the Simcox household when they heard what had happened was something to witness. The feminine element started in to scold Harley Greenoak for allowing his charge to run such a tremendous risk.

"Oh, he'd have to find his feet some time," was

the rejoinder. "He seems to have done it tolerably well too, for a young beginner."

A week or two went by, which Dick Selmes divided about equally between hunting bush-buck and rendering Greenoak's life a burden to him as to whether the head was being sufficiently cured, or whether it was quite safely out of the way of dogs or other destroyers and so forth. One morning that long-suffering individual remarked:

"We'll move on to-morrow, Dick."

"Well yes, I suppose it's about time. But—where?"

"Why, there's an old friend of mine named Hesketh who's just written me to bring you along. His farm's up in the Rooi Ruggensbergen. Man, but it's wild there I can tell you."

"All the better. What does the said Hesketh consist of?"

"Himself. He's a primitive old customer, and you'll have to rough it there. I warn you of that."

"The shoot good?"

"It just is."

"Hurrah then!" cried Dick. "I'm on."

"Well, we'll go back to the Bay, and pick up a Cape cart—it'll always sell again when we've done with it—and some more ammunition. Another horse, too, won't hurt. These two we got from Simcox are all right, but you've already shown a tendency to ride

yours to death. A fellow who's as keen as you are can't go on for ever pushing the same horse over all sorts of ground from sunrise to sunset."

"Good—and good again!" assented Dick.

The farewell he took of his entertainers was a very cordial one. Their hospitality had been as genuine as it was unceremonious. He had shared their life as one of themselves, and if the experience was totally different to any former one, why he had thoroughly enjoyed it, and said so, in no half-hearted way. Further, he had readily promised to repeat it on his way homeward.

"That's a thoroughly nice young chap," pronounced Simcox, decisively, as their late guests turned for a final wave of the hand before disappearing from view down the kloof. "Not an atom of 'side,' takes us as he finds us, and no nonsense about him. I hope he'll look in again, on his way back."

And Simcox's women-kind quite enthusiastically agreed with Simcox.

CHAPTER IV

THE MYSTERY OF SLAANG KLOOF

"But that is Slaang Kloof, Baas."

"I never said it wasn't. But—what if it is Slaang Kloof?"

"We cannot go in, Baas." And the speaker's pleasing, good-humoured face took on a dogged, not to say obstinate expression. A little more acquaintance with the country and its natives, and Dick Selmes would have known that when the countenance of one of these took on that expression, why, he might as well whisper words of sweet reasonableness into the long ears of an experienced and jibbing mule.

"Why can't we go in, Kleinbooi?" he said shortly.

"*Ou!* It is a place of *tagati*—of witchcraft," answered the Fingo.

"Witchcraft? Bosh!" exploded Dick. "Come now, Kleinbooi. Lay those dogs on to the spoor sharp, or my chances of getting that buck will become nothing at all, and I can't afford to lose such a fine ram as that because of your humbugging superstitions."

But the Fingo only shook his head.

"I can't do it, Baas," he said. "*Oud Baas** would not allow it. He allows nothing living to go into Slaang Kloof."

"But why? In Heaven's name, why?" rejoined Dick, impatiently.

"Because what goes in there living comes out dead," answered the other, seriously.

Dick Selmes stamped his foot, and mildly—very mildly—swore. He looked at his companion, who seemed most abominably in earnest, otherwise he was inclined to suspect that the Fingo was amusing himself at the expense of a new-comer. But, plainly, he could not go against the wishes of his host, and if the latter chose to give way to the absurd superstitions of mere savages, he supposed his weakness must be respected, but it was precious annoying all the same.

The dogs, some half-dozen great rough-haired mongrels, lay panting on the ground. One or two were restless, and showed a desire to start off upon the yet warm spoor which led into the forbidden place, but a stern mandate from the Fingo promptly checked this, and they lay down again.

These two, the white man and the black, were standing in a wide amphitheatre of bush, walled by rocky heights, now split asunder in gigantic, castellated crags, or frowning down in straight, smooth

* The old master.

krantzes, the nesting-places of innumerable aasvogels; as the long vertical streaks down their red, ironstone faces could testify. In front of them, opening out, as it were, through an immense natural portal formed by two jutting spurs of rock, was a lateral valley, covered with dense forest and sloping up to a lofty pile of mountain beyond, the slope ending in a line of broken cliff abounding in holes and caves. This much was visible from where they stood. But not a step nearer would the Fingo advance. Dick Selmes looked wistful.

"It was just there he went in, Kleinbooi," pointing to the slope under one of the jutting rock portals. "I glimpsed him for a minute, just under the krantz on that bare patch. By Jove, it's a pity to lose a fine bush-buck ram, and he was hit hard, too. If only you had been nearer with the dogs!"

"It is time to go home now, Baas," said the Fingo, with a glance at the sun, which was now dipping low to the skyline, causing the great rock faces to glow red gold in the slanting beams. The scene was one of wild rugged grandeur and beauty, softened by the cooing of hundreds of doves, the cheery piping whistle of spreeuws echoing from among the krantzes, and other mellow and varying bird-voices in the recesses of the brake.

"Has anybody ever met his death in there, Kleinbooi?" resumed Dick.

"Several, Baas."

"What kills them?"

"That is what nobody knows." And the speaker was so obviously unwilling to pursue the subject that Dick said nothing further upon it, but he made up his mind to question Harley Greenoak thereon without loss of time.

When the two came to where they had left their horses, it was evident that the hunt had not been altogether unsuccessful, for behind Dick's saddle was strapped a fine duiker ram, while from that of the Fingo hung several guinea-fowl and three or four dik-kop. Still, Selmes would not altogether feel comforted over the quarry he had lost.

This Kleinbooi was his host's right-hand man. He was a capital hunter, and was sent out with Dick what time no one else felt inclined to go, and in this capacity it was an advantage that he was able to speak excellent English. Harley Greenoak was not sorry, for his part; for such was his young charge's "keenness" that he would have dragged him out all day and every day in quest of some form of sport, and half the night, too, very frequently.

That evening, after supper, as they were seated indoors, for the farm was of considerable altitude and the nights were fresh, Dick Selmes was wondering how he should broach the subject to their host. Old Ephraim Hesketh was one of the early settlers of 1820. He was a widower, and lived alone on his vast farm in the

wildest recesses of the Rooi Ruggensbergen. He was a tall, lank old man, of the simplest of habits, who went to bed with the sun and got up with the same, chewed biltong when he was hungry, and drank calabash milk when he was thirsty, and, owing to his solitary life, was laconic and scanty of speech. This being so, it may be credited that his domestic arrangements were primitive in the extreme; and even adaptable Dick Selmes had looked a trifle blank when he first saw his room, with its battered tin wash-basin, empty-bottle candlestick, bare thatch, and gaping wainscottings, into which latter a remarkably large centipede was at that moment disappearing. In short, Simcox's place, though rough, was a palace compared with Haakdoornfontein, as old Hesketh's place was called.

"Well, young buffalo hunter," said the latter, as they sat down to an exceedingly frugal repast, "and how many of my bush-bucks have you accounted for to-day? We can't provide record buffaloes for you here, you see. You must get back to the Addo or trek right up country for that."

Dick Selmes laughed; then, judging the moment opportune, he launched out into an account of Kleinbooi's point-blank refusal to enter the forbidden kloof.

"He was quite right," said the old man, decisively, and his face seemed to grow serious. "Yes, quite right. In fact, I told him not even to take you near

it if possible, but I suppose he didn't know he was doing so in the excitement of the hunt."

Dick Selmes' face lit up with eagerness. If this hardened old settler, who believed in little else, believed in this weird mystery, why, it would be worth hearing about.

"Would you mind—er—spinning the yarn, Mr. Hesketh?" he blurted out eagerly.

"Well, it's a fact that for some years past not a man Jack who has gone into that kloof from this end —and you can't get into it from anywhere else—has come out alive," answered the old man. "When searched for and spoored down, they were found quite near the entrance, stone dead."

"What killed them?"

"That's what many of us would like to know. There was a mark, just where the neck joins the shoulder at the back, a tiny mark hardly bigger than a pin-point, a mere discoloration, and the bodies wore every appearance of death by snake-bite. That's how the place got its name—Slaang—or Snake Kloof."

"By Jove! And what sort of a snake was it?" said Dick.

"There was no snake. The most careful search revealed no trace of the spoor of anything of the kind. Besides, a snake-bite invariably contains two punctures. This was only one. Another strange thing is that the mark was always the same, and in the same place,

where the neck joins the shoulder; and yet another—that the people, when found, had, in each case, fallen when facing the way out of the kloof, as if they'd been running away from something. What? How many have come to grief? Seven in all—one Hottentot and six Kafirs. They had gone in after strayed stock, or to take out a bees' nest, or something of the kind. The Hottentot was the only one who was still conscious, and he knew absolutely nothing of what had happened to him or when it had. I nearly pulled him through by treating him for snake-bite, but it was too long after, and he kicked the bucket, like the rest. Have I been in since? No. I'm too old."

"But what on earth is your theory of it, Mr. Hesketh?" asked Dick Selmes, who was very much impressed by the story, and the old man's way of telling it. "Is there some kind of tree snake that drops down and swings itself up again after biting them? That would account for lack of spoor, you know."

"Quite right, young buffalo hunter," nodded old Hesketh. "But we've got no snakes that do that. All the tree sorts are harmless. The thing stumps me but—there it is."

"By Jingo, but I'd like to——" And Dick stopped short. Old Hesketh turned on him a lack-lustre eye.

"To try and solve the mystery yourself?" he

supplied. "M'yes. You'd better let it alone, young fellow. Keep your energies for another destroying buffalo, and you may come out of that with a whole skin. Eh, Greenoak?"

The latter, who had been a silent listener, nodded assent. Old Hesketh had—for him—taken an immense fancy to Dick since hearing of his shooting the buffalo bull in the Addo Bush, and that alone and with a single bullet. He was far too plucky a young fellow to be allowed to commit suicide in such an unsatisfactory cause as this, he decided.

"Don't let him cut into any such foolishness, Greenoak," he went on. "Keep your eye on him, Greenoak. Keep your eye on him."

And Greenoak promised he would. Then he went to bed, and, contrary to his usual custom, did not go to sleep immediately, but lay awake thinking. And at the same time precisely the same thing was holding good of Dick Selmes.

Now, in the course of the next two or three days, while the latter seldom missed an opportunity of plying his host with questions regarding Slaang Kloof, Harley Greenoak never opened his mouth on the subject. He seemed to treat it as a mere incident: a strange incident, it was true, but still an incident, and he had come across too many such in the course of a life adventurous beyond most lives to deem one incident, more or less, worth making any fuss about. He

seemed, in short, to have dismissed it from his mind.

Consequently, it is strange that a day or two later, Harley Greenoak might have been seen—were there any one to see him—standing before the entrance of Slaang Kloof alone.

His strong, bearded, sun-tanned face was set and thoughtful; his gnarled hands were closed round the barrels of a double gun, whose stock was grounded; and, slung round him, was a sort of bundle that bulged. The rifle barrel held a Martini cartridge, the smooth bore a heavy charge of Treble A buckshot.

He stood gazing into the place of fear, as though reading every tree and bush in its sombre forest depths. As a matter of fact, he was there to solve its secret. Old Hesketh, to whom his reputation was known as a clearer-up of many a dark and blood-fraught mystery of the veldt, and who was an old friend of his into the bargain, had sent for him with that express object, and, as it was an entirely out-of-the-way and new part of the country to show his charge, he had heartily welcomed the idea. But he had no notion whatever of counting his said charge into the adventure with him.

He looked at the two jutting rock spurs as though calculating the distance of one from the other. Then he walked steadily forward until well within the portals of the sinister and fatal valley.

Superficially it differed in no way from any round dozen of the wild bushy kloofs on any other part of the farm. There was the same vegetation, mimosa and other varieties of acacia, spongy spekboem, and spidery Kafir bean—the geranium and plumbago throwing out a confusion of scarlet and light mauve—here a row of euphorbia, there a patch of yellow-woods, from whose limbs depended a tangle of long, straight monkey-ropes. Here all was dim and cool and delightful, the sunshine completely shut off or but faintly networked in patches on the ground and tree trunks. But it was here that every instinctive faculty of grasp and perception implanted in the up-country man became keenly alert and awake. For, by a course of intuitive calculations, he had located this spot as the one where the fell and fatal terror had overtaken its victims.

The nerve and courage of Harley Greenoak were entirely beyond question, but that did not dull his imagination or render him dead to the fact that in this cool and peaceful forest retreat he walked in very great peril indeed, that if he would escape this hidden death which had overtaken others, awful in its mysterious suddenness, he would have to muster every faculty of quick observation, lightning-like decision of action, and untiring alertness which he possessed.

As he walked, apparently unconcerned, his ears were open to every sound, and, although he knew that

it was from above the peril should come, he did not look up, at least not directly. Then, suddenly, and without apparent reason, he leaped nimbly about a yard to his left; for his trained ear had caught the faintest possible sound overhead, and, as he did so, there was a soft hiss past his ear. Harley Greenoak had escaped death that time.

Quick as thought he threw up his gun, but in the moment between that action and the roar of the piece he glimpsed the most hideous and revolting object imaginable. The simian face, staring in bestial ferocity, the horn-like ears, the brown misshapen frame and limbs, were more suggestive of some forest fiend than of anything human. When the smoke had cleared away the thing had disappeared.

What did it mean? For the first time Harley Greenoak felt a thrill of superstitious misgiving as unpleasant as it was strange. He to miss, and to miss at that short distance, with a charge of buckshot too—for he had fired the smoothbore barrel—why, it was incredible! Nothing human could have escaped. Yet this thing had done so. It had not fallen, it had simply disappeared.

He stared upward at the spot. The tall, yellow-wood tree was strong and sound, and showed no sign of hole or cleft that would have held a rat. Ha!

Lying behind a large limb, motionless as the wood itself, blending so completely with its colour as to

escape detection, was the object of his search, watching him. But for the glint of the eye, he would have failed to discover it at all. Again his gun roared.

But—too late. With superhuman agility the thing had leapt away, and, springing from branch to branch with the quickness and security of cat and monkey combined, it seemed a hopeless chase to Greenoak, who, as he ran, marking its course by the swaying of the branches, had already reloaded both barrels. Just the fraction of a glimpse, and it was his last chance. Again the reverberation of the report rolled bellowing from cliff to cliff. With it was a shrill, beast-like scream, and something thudded heavily to the earth. Harley Greenoak walked leisurely up to it, and after a moment's examination came away with a smile of grim satisfaction on his face.

It was not to last, though. He had not gone far when a stony glare of horror came into his eyes as they rested on something lying on the ground, the form of a man, the form of Dick Selmes, his charge.

It was lying on its face with arms extended. But as he stood over it the eyes opened with a dull stupid stare, as that of a person awakened out of a heavy sleep.

"Wake up, Dick. Wake up, man," said Greenoak, decidedly, lugging him into a sitting posture. "Here, take a drink of this."

From the bundle that bulged he produced a bottle of brandy.

"Don't want to," said the other, sleepily.

"But you must, man. If you don't you're a dead 'un."

This told, and Dick obeyed. The effect of the spirit was marvellous, for, having swallowed enough to have rendered him helpless twice over under ordinary circumstances, it merely invigorated him now. Quick as thought Greenoak had cut away his shirt collar, and, sure enough, there on the neck was the fatal mark, the tiny, discoloured speck. This Greenoak promptly lanced, applying a mixture which he had with him. Then he made his charge get up and walk smartly up and down with him. In which occupation they were found by old Hesketh, who, having heard the shots, faint and far, had saddled up and hurried on in case the investigator should be in need of assistance.

When sufficiently restored, Dick Selmes was able to explain how he came to be there, and this he did somewhat shamefacedly. He had suspected that Greenoak was going to make some such investigation, and resented not being allowed to share in the adventure. Accordingly, he had pretended to go and hunt in a contrary direction, but had soon slipped round, so soon indeed as almost to reach Slaang Kloof first. He had entered the kloof not far behind him, and had kept him in view.

"Well, it nearly cost you your life, young fellow,"

said Hesketh. "Tell you what. You must have learnt something if you could keep Harley Greenoak in sight without his knowing it. What were you shooting at, Greenoak?"

"The mystery of Slaang Kloof is cleared up, answered the latter, laconically.

"I knew you'd do it if any one could. Well, what was it?"

"I'll show you later on. Now then, Dick. Take some more stuff, and walk quicker."

Harley Greenoak was not one to be hurried, but when they did return to investigate, he took them straight to where he had fired his first shot under the shade of the yellow-wood trees.

"Why, this is where I first felt queer," said Dick.

"No doubt," stooping down and picking up something that looked like a bit of stick about six or eight inches long. "See that?" showing a tiny needle-like point. "That's what made you feel queer, and all the others too. It's tipped with a strong and subtle poison."

"By Jove! You don't say so."

"Rather. I've got a theory that your clothes helped to save you. You were saying, Hesketh, that the only one of those who came to grief here and recovered consciousness was a Hottentot. Well, he would have had clothes on, and the Kaffirs wouldn't."

"Something in that, may be," answered the old man.

A little further on he picked up another of the tiny arrows. This one was sticking in the ground.

"The one I dodged," he said. "Come on further.

He led the way. Suddenly Dick Selmes gave start.

"What's that?" he said. "Ugh!"

"The mystery," answered Greenoak.

The monkey-like shape lying there looked more hideous and horrible in death, if possible than when it skipped along the tree-tops.

"But what is it?"

"A survivor of the original Bushmen who lived among the holes and caves of these mountains. He adopted this method of setting up a scare in order to have the run of this place unmolested. You see, if he went on the ground he'd leave spoor, and he knew that—hence the tree dodge."

"How is it we never found any of these arrows?" said old Hesketh.

"Probably you never thought of looking for them."

"No more we did."

"You see," explained Greenoak, "when you were spinning that yarn about the kloof it brought back to my mind one similar case I'd known of the kind, and I began to put two and two together. Well, the murdering little beast has only got what he deserved, but it'll save bother if we keep our mouths shut, all the same."

"But how do you know there are no more of 'em, Greenoak?" said Dick Selmes.

"I'm sure there aren't. This one is as old as Methuselah. He'd be the only one. You can use Slaang Kloof again, Hesketh."

CHAPTER V

HAZEL

"A NIECE of mine's coming up to-morrow to stay a bit," announced old Hesketh, a few days later.

"Oh, but—I say, won't we rather be making a crowd?" protested Dick. "Had no end of a jolly time, you know, Mr. Hesketh; but—er—wouldn't put you out for the world."

"Don't you bother your head about that, young buffalo hunter," answered the old man. "You're not crowding me any. I'll tell you when you are. So you've had a good time, eh?"

"Splendid," said Dick, heartily. "The shoot just is good, and as for this air, why, I never felt so fit in my life."

Old Hesketh nodded, and surveyed the speaker approvingly. The latter certainly looked as he had declared he felt—fit. His face, tanned a fine brown, was the picture of health. Out all day and every day, often having to work hard for his sport, whether for hours among the cliffs and crags stalking klip-springers or reebok, or toiling up to some high ridge on the

chance of getting a shot or two into the herd of baboons which usually frequented the other side, or one or other of the varied forms of sport the place afforded, Dick Selmes had attained the pink of hard condition.

"Well, then, don't be in a hurry to run away, rejoined old Hesketh. "Though I dare say it's slow enough of evenings with a couple of old fellows like me and Greenoak."

"Thanks," remarked the latter drily, and Dick spluttered.

"Some one young about the place'll make things more lively, anyhow," went on the old man. "And there's room and to spare, and a welcome for all."

Needless to say, Dick Selmes devoted a good deal of the intervening time to speculation on the subject of the expected arrival. Even as his host had said, "some one young" would be an acquisition, and then he wondered how old Hesketh, who seemed about a hundred, could own a niece to whom that definition applied. A grand-niece perhaps he had meant. Then, too, would she prove an acquisition? And a vision rose up within his mind of some awkward, half-educated girl brought up on just such a place as this, unused to the refinements of life, proportionately without ideas, and possibly given to affectation. Nor was Greenoak in a position to enlighten him upon the point, knowing nothing of old Hesketh's relations.

The next morning Dick Selmes was up before sunrise, and, taking his gun, went off on foot to a *hock* where he knew he should find a troop of wild guinea-fowl. He was successful, too, and as the splendid game birds dropped, one after another—for he had managed to break up the troop, and they were thus lying well—the keen and unmitigated enjoyment of the sport for the next half-hour was such as to leave no room for any outside thought or speculation. Picking up the seven of them he could find—two were runners, and of course without a dog were hopelessly lost—he started back homeward.

Now, seven full-grown guinea-fowl slung round one constitute no light load over three miles of rough and stony ground, and by the time Dick Selmes reached the house he had had more than enough of such exercise. When he did so reach it he became alive to the fact that a Cape cart, outspanned, with its harness hung over the splashboard, stood before the door. Now his curiosity would be satisfied.

Flinging down the birds, he entered the living-room. It was occupied by one person, a female, and she vigorously dusting.

She turned as he entered. Heavens! What was this? Red hair, a broad face thickly sown with large freckles, a wide mouth, and forty if a day! So this was old Hesketh's niece. "Some one young" had been his definition of her, and it was she

who was to make things lively by reason of the said juvenility!

"As ugly as sin," was his mental verdict. But aloud, politely, "Good morning. I must introduce myself. My name is Selmes; but—I don't think your uncle was expecting you quite so early."

The other stared.

"Ma what? Eh, but the laddie's clean daft—or is it only haverin' he is? Not but it's a braw bit laddie too"—with an approving glance at Dick's handsome face and tall proportions.

"Oh, Lord!" thought the latter, with a mental shudder. So this was the housemate who was to make them all young again with her youth and liveliness. Decidedly he must get Greenoak to invent some pretext for changing their quarters. Then the comic side struck him. Compared with himself, no doubt old Hesketh regarded this weird person, who talked broad Scotch, as "young."

"You are very energetic," he said pleasantly, for she had resumed her dusting. "Not at all tired after your trek, eh?"

"A'm never that," was the decisive reply.

"Well, your uncle will appreciate your energy at any rate. We men, left to ourselves, are sure to let things of that sort slide,"—referring to her undertaking.

"Ma—what?"

"Your uncle, Mr. Hesketh."

"The laddie *is* daft," she answered with decision. "Mon—but A have nae ony uncle."

Dick stared, and was destined to stare more in about a second. A faint rustle behind him, combined with what sounded suspiciously like a suppressed gurgle, caused him to wheel sharply round.

Framed in the doorway stood a girl—an exceedingly pretty girl. She had a sweet oval face, dark hair, and well-marked brows, and lustrous eyes to match. These now seemed sparkling and dancing with merriment.

"I am Mr. Hesketh's niece," began this wholly unexpected vision of beauty. "I suppose we are here earlier than we were expected," and there was a suspicious unsteadiness in the tones, as if the speaker were gulping down an irresistible peal of laughter.

"Eh, but A do believe he's been takkin' me for yeerself, Miss Hazel," spoke the red-haired woman; and poor Dick, now dead certain that the new-comer had overheard the foregoing dialogue, looked and felt about as big an ass as he had ever looked and felt in his life.

"It's my old nurse, Elsie McGunn," explained the girl. "We've been travelling ever so many hours, and now she'll be taking the cart home again after breakfast, and even then can't sit still and rest."

"Indeed, I was just admiring such a display of energy," said Dick, pleasantly.

"'Deed, laddie, and ye were just admiring nothing

at a' aboot me," retorted the plain-spoken Scotswoman, but quite good-naturedly.

The answer made opportunity for the girl to express her stifled feelings, and under cover of it she went off into the hearty merry peal of laughter whose main cause was the dialogue she had overheard between Dick Selmes and her unattractive retainer.

"You have been here before, I suppose, Miss Hesketh?" began Dick.

The other stared.

"Oh, I see," she said. "But my name isn't Hesketh—it's Brandon. Mr. Hesketh is my uncle on my mother's side."

"Of course. But, as you most likely know, your uncle is a man of few words, and, beyond mentioning the fact that you were coming, gave us no further information. He didn't even tell us your name. Naturally I didn't like to appear inquisitive."

"Naturally," assented the other; and again the laugh struggled in her eyes, evoked by the recollection of the comical situation for which that lack of inquisitiveness was responsible. "But now—as you have the advantage of me—I have told you who I am, suppose you tell me who you are."

There was a sweet, sunny frankness about this girl, an utter absence of self-consciousness that made Dick stare. Did they grow many like her in this strange, fascinating country, he wondered? As he told her his

identity a new interest came into her eyes, but wholly unsuspected by himself.

"Ay, and is yon Dick Selmes?"

The interruption proceeded from the wielder of the duster, in the further corner of the room.

"Elsie!" cried the girl, half horrified, half mirthful. "You are forgetting yourself. You needn't be quite so familiar, at any rate."

"Eh! An' would we be makkin' a stranger of the laddie?" tranquilly replied the irrepressible Scotswoman.

Dick burst into a hearty roar.

"Quite right, Elsie," he cried. "I believe we're going to be jolly good friends, you and I."

This was a character, he decided—a howling joke. He was almost sorry she was going back again directly, whereas when he had first heard the announcement he had been anything but sorry. Then the sound of voices outside told that the master of the place and the other guest had returned.

Old Hesketh greeted his niece affectionately, but undemonstratively, as was his way.

"This is Harley Greenoak," he said. "You may have heard of him."

The girl's face lit up with interest.

"I should think so," she said, as she put forth her hand. "Who hasn't?"

"Oh, about nine hundred million people, I suppose,"

tranquilly answered the subject of this implied exordium. "I don't expect that leaves many more in the world."

"Well, there's no one in South Africa who hasn't, at any rate," rejoined the girl. And Dick Selmes, confound it, was half ashamed of a sneaking satisfaction that Harley Greenoak's beard was rapidly turning grey.

"That you, Elsie?" said old Hesketh, shaking hands with the privileged retainer. "Well, and you haven't managed to pick up a husband yet? Ho, ho!"

"Yan's the wurrd, Mr. Hesketh. They're to be had for the pickin' up. But it'll end in ma havin' to come and tak' care o' yeerself, A'm thinkin'. Yan dust," designating her recent work, "must have been lyin' aroound for a yeer at least."

This retort, naïvely ambiguous, given with perfect equability, raised a laugh among its hearers, who chose to read but one of its two potential meanings.

"Now, Uncle Eph," said the girl, decisively. "We are going to get the breakfast ready, and it's nearly ready now—and we've got a little surprise for you. I should prefer you all to go outside and amuse yourselves for the next quarter of an hour; in fact, till I call you in."

This was a command there was no gainsaying. Old Ephraim gave a dry chuckle, reached for his pipe, and obeyed without a word. Harley Greenoak likewise. But Dick Selmes said—

"Do let me stay and help you, Miss Brandon. Why, it'll be like a jolly picnic."

She hesitated a moment.

"No," she said. "We don't want any men." Then he followed the others.

When they returned they found she had been as good as her word. This was a surprise indeed. Dick Selmes, the only one given to expressing that emotion outwardly, was metaphorically rubbing his eyes. Where, for instance, was the soiled, coarse-textured old cloth, covering one end of the bare table—where the camp-kettle, handed from one to the other from its usual resting-place on the floor, as more coffee was needed? Where the weather-beaten enamel ware, the tin pannikins holding the milk and sugar, the cloudy spoons? Where, too, the dark-brown bread, and the mess badly and indifferently cooked in a frying-pan? Gone—wholly gone. Instead, a snowy cloth, bright, hissing urn, patterned china, *roester-koekjes* steaming white within. Chops, too, hot from the gridiron, juicy and crisp, and a great honeycomb reposing in a sparkling cut-glass dish. The metamorphosis was complete indeed.

"We'll come to believe in fairy tales again soon," said old Hesketh as he gazed upon this. "You haven't let the grass grow under your feet—eh, Hazel?"

"No, Uncle Eph. I'm going to civilize you a bit,

now that I'm here. You men get into shockingly careless ways. What's the good of having all these nice tablecloths and tea sets if you don't use them? So the first thing we did was to dig them out of the boxes where they were stowed away. Then we disestablished the old Hottentot cook—'cook' indeed! —and behold the result!"

"It's great—great!" cried Dick Selmes with enthusiasm. Then, becoming guiltily aware that he might be seeming to disparage his host's normal arrangements, he added lamely, "Er—of course, we do get—er—as you say, Miss Brandon, with nobody to take care of us. And—you've done it, and no mistake."

Then old Hesketh put a few of his terse, laconic questions as to the welfare of those she had left at home, and characteristically dismissed the subject from his mind. Harley Greenoak, normally taciturn, said little; but Dick Selmes was a host in himself, and soon the conversation became a dialogue between these two young people. They were chattering away as if they had known each other all their lives.

Soon after breakfast the Cape cart was inspanned.

"I'm hopin', sir," said Elsie McGunn, just before she climbed to her seat, "that ye'll nae be takkin' it ill onything A may have said."

"Not a bit of it, Elsie," cried Dick, shaking her heartily by the hand. "Not a bit of it. Why, you've

given us a thundering big laugh or two. What better could one say? Good-bye."

"Ay, but yander's a braw laddie," whispered the Scotswoman to her charge, as they bade each other good-bye. "A braw laddie, and a guid one. Mind your hairt, lassie; mind your hairt." And flicking her whip, she sent the cart jolting off down the winding stony road.

CHAPTER VI

HARLEY GREENOAK HAS MISGIVINGS

THE coming of Hazel Brandon effected something like a revolution at Haakdoornfontein, for she was as good as her word, and at once set to work to reform the interior of that easy-going, happy-go-lucky establishment out of all recognition. The table department she kept going on the same lines as the initiation we saw her make, and the same extended to the rooms. No more dust, no more makeshifts. From all sorts of unsuspected places she fished out hidden things. Dick Selmes, for instance, coming in after a long day's hunt, stared to find what magic had been wrought in his room. Snowy sheets and pillow-cases on the bed, things his host despised as feminine superfluities, equally snowy towels instead of the one cloudy one he had been forced to make shift with; the rickety three-legged washstand with its rusty tin basin had given way to a neat chintz-covered packing-case and patterned crockery—and the empty-bottle candlestick had been disestablished in favour of a brass one. On the same lines had the quarters of the other two been

reorganized, except that old Hesketh drew the line at sheets. Blankets were good enough for any man, he declared, and flatly refused to court rheumatism at his time of life by sleeping between cold, glazy stuff like that.

Our friend Dick now began to overhaul his kit, and was conscious of searchings of heart as he realized that it was so limited. He had brought little more than absolute necessaries in the way of clothing. Greenoak had warned him that he would have to do without luxuries at Haakdoornfontein, and, by Jingo, Greenoak had been right up till now; but Greenoak, of course, had not been able to foretell the sudden irruption of a bright, refined, and exceedingly pretty girl upon their rough and ready mode of living.

And Hazel Brandon was all that. Such sunshine did her presence and merry spirits and winning ways create in this sober male household, that the two older members of the same felt almost uneasy, so incongruous did it seem to the quiet and somewhat sombre life of the place. The younger—well, he was in something of a whirl. One thing about the girl puzzled him, and that was how she could be so nearly related to his host. The latter he was very taken with. He was a dear old chap, as he was wont to say; but with all his sterling qualities, old Hesketh was certainly not quite his equal from a social

standpoint. Yet this girl looked absolutely thoroughbred; was, too, in all her ways and ideas. She must have got it on her father's side, conjectured Dick, perhaps correctly.

There was one thing about her that appealed to him if only that he believed he had encountered it in her for the first time. She was so absolutely natural and devoid of self-consciousness. True he had seen the counterfeit of this in other girls of his acquaintance, but it had not seemed to ring true. He had felt sure—again perhaps correctly—that they were doing it for effect; "crowding it on," as he more tersely put it. But here he detected no trace of any such thing.

"Do you think I am such a feeble tottering creature, Mr. Selmes, that I can't even turn a door handle for myself?" she said one day, when he had bounded across the room—upsetting one chair and barking his shin against another in his anxiety to perform that onerous undertaking for her.

The words were said with a bright smile. Dick mumbled something.

"Well, I can, then. I'm not one of your helpless English girls who can't even stick a stamp on a letter for themselves."

"Oh, you've been in England, then?"

"Haven't I! For three years. Not long, but still I went about a good deal."

"Where?" he asked eagerly.

She named several places; one at which he himself had stayed on the occasion of a shooting party. Here was an additional link in common.

"Has our young buffalo hunter shot all the game on the farm, Greenoak?" said old Hesketh, one day as the two sat smoking on the stoep.

"Why?"

"Because he don't seem over keen on going after it these days. His gun'll get rusty if he don't mind," chuckled the old man, reaching a handful of tobacco out of his pocket and cramming his pipe.

"The young folks seem to have cottoned to each other," he went on, between puffs. The other had no need to follow the glance—for "the young folks" aforesaid had been visible to him for some time away down the kloof, and the sight, even before his companion's remark, had set Harley Greenoak thinking.

So far his charge had given him no trouble. Twice he had got him out of a situation which would certainly have cost him his life; in other words, had saved his life twice. That, however, was all in the bond. He thought nothing of that. But here loomed a complication which neither himself nor Sir Anson had foreseen. Both had only taken into consideration mere difficulties or dangers of field and flood; but

here was a new side to his responsibility. With his keen insight into character he had sized up old Hesketh's niece on very short acquaintance; and his private opinion was that whoever succeeded in winning the affections of this girl—whether Dick Selmes, or anybody else—would be a very lucky fellow. But would Sir Anson be likely to share this opinion? That was the question, and in all probability one to be answered with a negative. He might have other views for his son, or he might object to the latter contracting any tie for the present—or all sorts of reasons. Harley Greenoak realized that he had some cause for anxiety.

If anything should come of this matter, and Sir Anson considered that he had failed in his responsibility, he would unhesitatingly forego any remuneration; but his anxiety rested on higher grounds than pecuniary loss. He had a great liking for his charge, and for his charge's father, and, worse still perhaps, his reliability would stand impugned. Now, it was precisely for reliability that Harley Greenoak enjoyed a reputation little short of infallible, and of this he himself was aware, and, though secretly, was intensely proud.

He wondered if Hesketh—sly old fox—had brought about the situation with deliberate design, in order to do a good turn to his kinsfolk. It might well have been—and one could hardly blame him if it were so.

Instinctively Greenoak realized that it would be useless for him to interfere at this stage. He had tried it at an earlier one, though "interfere" is too strong a word for the easy, natural, tactful way in which he had suggested they should move somewhere else. His charge, equally and naturally, but quite good-humouredly, had scouted the idea. Hesketh would be hurt, he had declared. He was no end of a jolly old chap, and he, Dick, wouldn't offend him for the world. And then Haakdoornfontein was no end of a jolly place, with a different shoot, by Jingo, for every day in the year. And Greenoak had laughed drily, as he reflected that his charge's enthusiasm for that form of sport had flagged perceptibly of late. But like a wise man and a tactful one he had known better than to push the suggestion further. Things must just take their course, he decided. A matter of this kind was a delicate one, and one in which the man most concerned must judge for himself. At any rate, it was clean outside his own province.

"These young 'uns, you know, will have their heads," now went on old Hesketh, puffing out smoke. "I suppose we took our doses of foolishness, Greenoak, when we were at their time. Though, I dunno about me. It was just 'yes or no' with the old woman, 'take it or leave it.' She took it, and managed the place. I don't know, either, that things haven't been

quieter—well, since I've managed it myself," he added drily.

There lay the summing up of a lifetime; a hard, lonely, matter-of-fact, out-of-the-world lifetime. Greenoak nodded. He was not going to make any comment on the situation. He was not going to ruffle his old friend's susceptibilities by any suggestion that Dick's father might object, more or less strongly, to the said situation and its logical outcome. Old Hesketh's social creed was simplicity itself: "Black's black and white's white, and one white man's as good as another, and no better." This Greenoak knew.

Again he wondered whether Hesketh had brought about the situation with a purpose. Hesketh was a mine of natural shrewdness, and here was scope for it. Dick Selmes had spent some three weeks on this wild and remote place, roughing it as he had probably never dreamed of roughing it, his sole companions one old and one elderly man—Greenoak was modest, you see. Then, enter a bright, pretty, taking girl, who makes the rough places, as by magic, smooth, imports the refinement to which his charge has been accustomed, with one sweep of the wand, and whose personality is in itself a supplement to the sunshine. No contrast could be more strongly marked. Assuredly if Hesketh had of his own intuition brought off such a dramatic

stroke, why, Hesketh was more of a genius than the acquaintance of that rugged old recluse would have given him credit for being. But this reflection did not tend to lighten Harley Greenoak's private disquietude.

CHAPTER VII

GOOD NEWS

"WHEN are you going to shoot another buck for us, Mr. Selmes?" Hazel Brandon was saying. "As officer in charge of the Commissariat Department, it's my duty to tell you that if you don't we shall have to begin on mutton, and it's your especial mission to keep us in game. So—when are you?"

"When you come and help me do it."

"Help you? Yes—like the other evening when we went to *voor-ly* for a bush-buck over Slaang Draai, and you talked so much that although we sat there till it was dark none came out. Now what sort of 'help' is that?"

He looked down into the bright, teasing face, and thought he had seldom—or was it ever?—looked upon any sight which delighted him more.

"Well, you helped me to talk anyhow," he said. "Now didn't you?"

One form of sport was to gain a point overlooking this or that bushy kloof about an hour before sundown and sit still, waiting till the bush-bucks began to move.

Thus a shot was to be obtained when one showed upon an open space. Dick Selmes, who had become a very fair rifle shot, had bagged several this way. The occasion to which the girl had referred was one on which he had persuaded her to accompany him—with the result described.

"Never mind," he went on, without waiting for her answer. "It was no end jolly all the same. Wasn't it?"

"I don't know. I seem to remember it became no end cold," she laughed. "But you're trying to get away from the point. You must go and shoot a buck for me this afternoon. Why, you hardly ever hunt now. You're getting quite lazy."

It was a coincidence that her uncle should be making substantially the same remark about a quarter of a mile away.

"Lazy! I like that. How about all those jolly rides we've been having? Lazy!"

"Well, I didn't mean it in its strictly literal sense," she answered. "Yes, I have enjoyed those rides."

Hazel had been about a fortnight at Haakdoornfontein, and during that time she and Dick Selmes had become very friendly indeed. It was the old story—youth, mutual attraction and propinquity, and but for the fact that she was the stronger minded of the two, and adhered to a rigid resolution not to neglect her self-imposed household duties, it is probable that their

elders would have seen very little of her or of either of them.

"You know, it was quite a surprise to me to find you and Mr. Greenoak here," she went on. "You know Uncle Eph by this time. Well, he never writes a word that he isn't obliged to; so when mother sent a boy with a note to say I was coming, he just returned for answer 'Glad to see her.' That and no more."

"By Jove!" cried Dick. "And you didn't know we were here."

"Not an atom. I expected to find him alone, as usual. He never has people here."

"We ought to be flattered then. Greenoak thinks your uncle got him here on purpose to try and clear up that Slaang Kloof mystery. But that's ancient history now, and he doesn't seem to want us to go. He objected, quite strongly for him, when I suggested moving on."

"Did he? He has taken quite a fancy to you. I never knew him so gracious to any *man* under about fifty before. He's usually grim."

"I think him a dear old chap," said Dick, decisively. "Such a character too. Well, I'm jolly glad he didn't take me at my word," with a meaning look at the sweet sparkling face beside him; which look the owner of the said face chose utterly to ignore. But from the foregoing dialogue it is obvious that Harley Greenoak's suspicions as to his host's complicity in any possible

complications with regard to his charge were without foundation in fact.

"I shouldn't be surprised if Mr. Greenoak was right, and that Uncle Eph did get him up here to clear up the mystery," said Hazel. "Though none of you—not even you—will ever tell me what that mystery is," she added reproachfully. "Well, never mind. I'm not going to press you to. I believe I'll ask Kleinbooi though."

Whereby it will be seen that Harley Greenoak's advice to the other two concerned, to keep silence as to the nature of the Slaang Kloof mystery, had been rigidly adhered to.

Dick laughed. "You might as well ask that tree."

"Does he know?"

"I don't suppose he *knows*, but if he guesses he'd sooner hang himself than let on a word."

"Do you know, Mr. Greenoak has a reputation for clearing up mysteries. There was that haunted farm on the Sneeuw River in our neighbourhood. No one could stay there; all sorts of weird things happened. The new owner—who bought it for a song, on the strength of its dark reputation—got Mr. Greenoak to investigate the affair, and he cleared it up to the satisfaction of all concerned; and the new people never had any more bother or disturbance. They've lived there ever since. But Mr. Greenoak never let go a

word as to what the mystery was or how he had put an end to it; no, not even to the owner himself."

"Well, I shan't ask him," said Dick Selmes, very interested, "for it's a dead cert. that if he never told anybody else he won't tell me."

"There are other stories about him, too. Once he was instrumental in saving two Kafirs from being hanged—only just in the nick of time—for the murder of a Dutchman's wife, by finding out that it had been done by the Dutchman himself."

"Was the Dutchman hanged?"

"He would have been, only he got away to the Transvaal in time. He was safe there, of course."

"Well, I hope if Greenoak gets on to any more enterprises of the kind he'll cut me into them with him —that's all," said Dick. "Hallo! Here's Kleinbooi."

"Baas," said the Fingo, saluting, "I got very good bit news. There's a big tiger fast in the trap, up there, in Slaang Kloof. I go tell *Ou' Baas.* He come quick shoot it."

"Oh, good—and good again!" cried Dick. "We'll go up there sharp."

"Oh, never mind me. Only, I don't feel inclined to *run*," said Hazel, mischievously; for her companion in his excitement had started off with quick eager strides.

"So sorry," answered Dick, contritely, at once falling back.

"Never mind," said the girl, "go on ahead and tell them. Things in traps break loose sometimes if left too long. So the sooner we get there the better."

"We? Are you going with us, then?" eagerly.

"Certainly. So tell them to saddle up a horse for me too. Now go on, and don't lose any time, or the tiger may break loose before we get there and get clean away."

Presumably everybody knows that there is no such thing as a tiger on the whole African continent—north, south, east, or west. What everybody, however, may not know is that in the southern section of the same, "tiger" is the colloquial word used to designate leopard, and that invariably; hence, of course, the trapped beast in this case represented not "Stripes" but "Spots."

"Well, well," said old Hesketh, when he was told, "that's good news certainly. How was he caught, Kleinbooi?"

"By one fore leg, Baas. He seems fast, but it might be as well to go and shoot him, now at once."

"*Ja*, that's so. Tell Dirk to saddle up three horses—it don't matter which—what's that? Four?" turning to his niece, who had just joined them. "Four, did you say, girlie?"

"Certainly," said Hazel. "I'm going too. I don't see why I should be left out of the fun."

The old man chuckled.

"All right," he said. Then ironically, "How long'll you take getting ready? Half an hour?"

"Half a minute," she answered, withdrawing to change into a habit skirt, and reappearing in not more than double the time named. Then they started.

"Get back, you *schelms*, get back!" vociferated old Hesketh, whipping back the dogs, who, scenting sport, had sprung up, whining and yowling with delight. "We don't want you to-day. They'd spoil the skin, you know, if they started to worry it," he added in explanation to Dick. "Besides, some of 'em are bound to get badly chawed. A trapped tiger's no joke to anything that gets within reach of the brute. Clear them out, Kleinbooi."

This the Fingo did with the aid of sticks and stones, and much forcible expostulation, and the disappointed pack slunk back, to console itself by getting up a civil war on its own account.

"Don't fire at anything on the way, Dick," enjoined Greenoak, as they started. "No matter what gets up, let it go. Our catch might quite possibly pull himself loose if he got a sudden *schrek*."

Dick nodded, and went on with his conversation with Hazel, by whose side it is hardly necessary to explain he was riding. Old Hesketh was shambling along on a correspondingly veteran steed, but he had no firearm. It didn't require three men to shoot one trapped tiger, he had declared, and he wasn't going to

be bothered carrying unnecessary articles. Greenoak on this occasion had his ·500 Express, and Dick Selmes his combination rifle and smoothbore.

"I only wish the beast was loose," said the latter to his companion. "There'd be rare fun in hunting him then."

"You may still have your wish, Dick," said Greenoak over his shoulder.

"I hope not," said Hazel, quickly. "And yet—I oughtn't to mind with two such dead shots beside me. Yes—I think it would be rather exciting."

Secretly the girl was not quite at ease. They were in Slaang Kloof now. Riding beneath the cool shade of the trees, the dim sunlight falling in network patches where it struggled through the "monkey ropes" trailing from bough to ground, there was a sense of dim mystery seeming to grow out of the place. So strongly did it affect her, that although not in the least given to hysteria, Hazel Brandon realized that were she alone here now, she would be conscious of a deadly fear. As it was, what if the trapped beast had broken loose, and in its mad rage were to pounce upon them suddenly? No, the thought was not a reassuring one.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRAPPED LEOPARD

Soon the forest began to lighten and the tall yellow-wood trees to give way to high scrub with open patches here and there. Here the Fingo, Kleinbooi, who had been striding on in front, his kerrie over his shoulder, now signed them to dismount. This they did, and the horses were made fast to convenient boughs.

Guided by Kleinbooi they walked cautiously forward, the three men in front, the girl just behind; Dick Selmes and Greenoak with their pieces in readiness. Then a vicious snarl, and the clank of iron told them that the object of their quest was reached, and that at any rate it had not yet succeeded in breaking loose.

A small runlet here trickled down the kloof in a chain of water-holes. Beside one of these, in a stony open space, stood a magnificent leopard. The great iron gin trap had caught the poor beast just above one front pad, and the powerful grip held him firmly.

At sight of his intending destroyers the creature

sank down into a crouching attitude, uttering a hideous yell that was half a snarl, evoked by the renewed agony of the movement. His unwounded forepaw was over the trap, his hindquarters gathered beneath him as though for a spring, and his long tail waved viciously to and fro. A deep, hoarse, snarling growl issued from his throat, and in his yellow eyes was a perfectly fiend-like glare of helpless ferocity. His jaws were dropping great flakes of foam reddened with blood, for he had been plentifully licking his wounded limb.

"Oh, do shoot, and have done with it," whispered Hazel, shuddering violently.

"Hold on, Greenoak. Don't blaze yet," said Dick Selmes, who had not heard. "I want to have a closer look."

"Better not," warned Harley Greenock, who had already got his quarry covered. "He might break loose, or the chain might give"—the trap was chained to a tree.

But the other laughed recklessly, and continued to advance—we dare not swear that the consciousness of having a certain form of gallery to play to did not add to his rashness. He halted within very few yards of the maddened beast.

The latter was now frightful to behold. He seemed to flatten himself lower in his crouch. The great speckled head literally opened, until, viewed in

section, it resembled a crescent. The lips were drawn back from the formidable fangs till the contracted folds of the skin well-nigh closed the glaring eyes, and the infuriated snarl had become something terrific.

Suddenly every muscle in the beast's body was seen to stiffen. With an appalling yell it flung itself forward. Dick Selmes was hurled to the ground, half stunned; his confused senses, feebly conscious of the crash of a report, leading him to suppose he had been shot by accident.

"Well of all the complete young idiots I ever saw, you *are* the champion one," cried old Hesketh, with excusable heat, having ascertained that his guest was uninjured. The latter laughed, rather feebly, for he felt sore all over.

"What's the row, eh? Greenoak, I thought you'd shot me."

"The row? Look there," was the answer grimly given.

Dick screwed himself round. There lay the iron trap — empty, and further on, the spotted corpse of the great leopard. He himself was *between the two*.

"Lucky Greenoak's got the eye of a hawk, and the quickness of a flash of lightning," said his host, grimly. "I know *I* could never have got in that shot in time. How would you be feeling now if the brute's spring

hadn't been cut short? He was stone dead in the middle of it when he knocked you over."

"Did he knock me over then?" said Dick, rising to his feet.

"Rather," answered Greenoak. "Even then the muscular contraction of his claws might have given you fits; but he made a bad shot—only hit you with his shoulder and knocked you flying."

They gathered round the splendid beast, grim and terrible still in death. The heavy Express bullet had gone clean through the heart.

"By George, but I've had a narrow squeak for it!" ejaculated Dick. Then his glance fell upon Hazel Brandon, who was standing a little in the background, white and shuddering, and his heart smote him with self-wrath and contempt. He had thought to show off, and had only succeeded in frightening her, and making a most egregious ass of himself.

"Oh, Miss Brandon, I'm so sorry I've given you a scare!" he exclaimed penitently. "But it's all right now. Come and look at the tiger—such a splendid beast."

"Well, you did give me rather a fright," she said, with a faint smile, while the colour returned to her cheeks. "But—what a splendid shot!"

"Wasn't it!" answered Dick, whole-heartedly, at the same time not quite able to help wishing that the positions had been exactly reversed. He was conscious,

too, that this was the third time Harley Greenoak had stepped between himself and sure and certain death. The latter was thinking the same thing, and was more than ever convinced that Sir Anson had spoken the bare truth in saying that he would find his charge no sinecure. The while he had drawn his sheath knife and was tucking up his shirt-sleeves.

"We'll just strip off this uncommonly fine skin, Kleinbooi and I," he announced imperturbably. "But as it isn't a pleasant process to watch, I'd suggest that Miss Brandon should wait for us where we left the horses."

"That's a good idea," said Dick, briskly. "Come along, Miss Brandon. We'll wait there."

Having thrown off her temporary scare, Hazel turned to her uncle and rated him soundly for having the trap set at all. It was abominably cruel, she declared, unsportsmanlike too. The old man chuckled.

"Ho—ho! Not bad that, for a girl who's been raised on a farm," he said. "Don't they ever set traps down at Windhoek then, or has your father got too many sheep and calves? I can tell you this beast has been taking toll of mine finely."

"Well, why don't you hunt him then, in fair and sportsmanlike fashion," retorted the girl, "instead of setting an abominably cruel thing like that?"

"Hunt him? Ho—ho! Look there."

He pointed to the upper end of the hollow, which was shut in by a wall of terraced rock and cliff. But many a dark hole and crack on the face of this showed that the towering rampart was honeycombed by caves and labyrinthine galleries.

"How are you going to get him out of these?" went on old Hesketh. "Why, all the dogs in the world wouldn't get him out. He'd only have to skip from one hole to another. Eh, Greenoak?"

The latter nodded.

"Well, it's abominably cruel all the same," repeated Hazel as she turned away. "Aren't I right, Mr. Selmes?"

"A trap that doesn't kill outright always is cruel," answered the diplomatic Dick, whose last wish in the world was to disagree with her. "I know I've often thought it hard luck on the rabbits at home when they got into one—poor little beggars."

"Do you know," she went on, jumping from one subject to another, "I can't tell you how glad I am to have had the opportunity of meeting Mr. Greenoak. What a splendid man he is! Isn't he?"

"Rather. He's a thundering good old chap."

Hazel lifted an eyebrow.

"Old! But you surely don't call him old. Why, he's just in his prime. Oh, I see, you mean it as a term of comradeship," she added.

"Er—yes. That was it," agreed Dick, upon

whose mind a very unwelcome qualm was beginning to force itself.

"So strong and cool and clearheaded," she went on, "and such nerve. Why, he's everything a man should be. Don't you agree with me?"

"Most decidedly."

"Ah, I like to hear a man speak well of another."

"Why? Isn't it usual?" said Dick.

"No. At least not within my experience. Almost invariably if I boom one man to another that other will either agree half-heartedly, or find something disparaging to say."

"Well, even if I felt that way inclined, I should be an absolutely unspeakable cur were I to say anything of the sort about Greenoak, considering that this is the third time he has saved my life," answered Dick.

"Is it? Oh, do tell me about the others," cried Hazel, eagerly.

"I can't tell you about the other because it comes into the mystery of this place, as to which, as you know, we are sworn to secrecy. But I told you the first. It was the night I shot the big buffalo."

Looking down into the bright, sparkling eager face, Dick Selmes was conscious of that unwelcome misgiving taking even more definite hold of his mind. The eagerness with which she hung upon his words was not because they were *his* words. Greenoak of all people! Why, he must be old enough to be her father,

concluded Dick, in his inexperience rather consoling himself with the thought.

"Yes, you told me that," rejoined Hazel. "But you are only one of many. Harley Greenoak has the reputation of having saved countless lives and got no end of people out of difficulties of one kind or another, yet he never talks about it, they say. I can't tell you how proud I am to have made his acquaintance."

"Shall I tell him so, for here he comes?" said Dick, mischievously. "Now, or when you're not there?"

"If you do I'll never speak to you again. And yet I don't know that I'd greatly care if you did."

They had been waiting as directed, where the horses had been left, and now the other two were coming up.

"You've made a quick job of that, Greenoak," said Dick.

"Yes. But I only took charge of the more difficult part, Kleinbooi'll do the rest. It's a good skin, Dick, and ought to look well in your hall, or wherever you stick up such things."

Dick stared.

"But it's yours," he cried. "Why, it was your shot —and a jolly fine shot too. Don't know where I'd have been but for it."

"Oh, that's all right. I've nowhere to keep trophies and you have. You'll be able to hang it under the buffalo head." And the speaker swung himself into

the saddle, and resumed his conversation with old Hesketh.

"There!" exclaimed Hazel. "Isn't that like him? And you hardly said thank you."

"Greenoak doesn't like much thanking. It seems to hurt him; sets him on the shrink, don't you know."

"I can quite believe that," rejoined Hazel. "Now —you can help me to mount."

The while, the subject under discussion was some way ahead, with Hesketh. They were in fact passing the scene of that other tragedy.

"Not much trace of that affair," Hesketh was saying as he glanced keenly around. "Tell you what, though, I wonder yon tiger didn't put an end to the 'mystery' long ago, and save us the trouble. Ho-ho!"

"I don't," rejoined Greenoak, quietly. "It'd have to be a very smart tiger indeed to get the blind side of a veteran Bushman. The 'mystery' was a darn sight more likely to skoff the tiger than the tiger was to skoff the 'mystery.'"

CHAPTER IX

A WAY OUT

Postal delivery at Haakdoornfontein was, as an institution, non-existent; and when old Hesketh desired communication with or from the outside world he obtained it by dispatching a boy to the nearest field-cornet's, some sixteen or seventeen miles away. This, for obvious reasons, he did not do very often.

Harley Greenoak was seated on a stone, on the shaded side of the shearing-house, thinking. The shade was almost too cool, for there was a forecasting touch of crisp winter in the clear atmosphere and vivid blue of the cloudless sky. He could see the long, gaunt figure of his host, pottering about down at the lands, and every now and then from the kitchen at the back of the house, there came to his ears the clear tones of Hazel's voice endeavouring to convey instruction into the opaque mind of the yellow-skinned cook. The sounds in no wise interrupted his train of thought; rather they fitted in with it, for in it the utterer of them bore her share.

From his pocket he drew forth a letter. This he

spread out open before him, and began to study, not for the first time. It had arrived the previous evening, and was several days overdue, owing to Hesketh's erratic postal provisions as set forward above. The writing was not easily decipherable, and the contents, well—they were commonplace on the surface, but beneath, to one well acquainted with the writer, meaning enough could be read. Now Harley Greenoak and the Commandant of the Frontier Armed and Mounted Police were very old friends indeed.

There was restlessness on and beyond the border. The Transkeian tribes needed watching, and some careful handling, and the Police might have work cut out for them. And, by-the-by, where was Greenoak now, and what was he doing; because if nothing in particular, added the writer, why shouldn't he come up to the border and stay with him a bit, and have some talks over old times?

Such was the gist of the letter, but its recipient read deeper than that. Few men understood natives and their ways more thoroughly than himself, few men were as well known to and as thoroughly trusted by them, and none better. He foresaw a possibility of usefulness, of great usefulness; and when such was the case, it must be a very grave impediment indeed that Harley Greenoak would allow to stand in his way.

Hazel Brandon had not exaggerated in her estimate of his character; and time after time his natural gifts

had found for him the opportunity of being of service to his friends—often to the saving of life—and that without hope or thought of reward. And here stood forth another such opportunity; but—how would it fit in with the charge he had undertaken? As it happened it would so fit in.

Every day of late he had been growing more anxious; every day he had seen reason for desiring to get Dick Selmes away from Haakdoornfontein. Every day seemed to draw the two young people together more and more. This, under other circumstances would have been nothing but satisfactory, but—what of his own responsibility towards the father of his charge? If the affair was more than skin deep, if it had reached a serious stage on both sides, why they could both very well afford to wait; Dick until he had consulted his father, and so until his—Greenoak's—charge was at an end. Then he could return, on his own responsibility, and if he succeeded in winning this girl, why in the thinker's estimation he would be very lucky, as we have said. That would be the only straight and satisfactory solution of the difficulty, decided Greenoak.

And towards such solution the Commandant's letter seemed now to open a way. If he read Dick's character aright, the prospect of a certain amount of adventure would irresistibly appeal. They would respond to the invitation and join his old friend;

and he would show his charge some of the phases of border life, as in any case he had intended eventually to do.

"Well, Mr. Greenoak, and have you decided the knotty point yet? It must be a very knotty one." And the speaker's winsome face, framed within an ample and snowy *kapje*, sparkled with sheer light-heartedness.

"That's just what I believe I have done," he answered, looking up at her. He had of course been aware of her approach, but he was one of those who can concentrate their powers of thought independently of external distractions.

"It must have been an extremely knotty one," she went on, her glance resting on the sheet still grasped in the brown muscular hand, "because for nearly an hour you might as well have been a statue."

"Does a statue fill and light a pipe two or three times an hour, Miss Brandon?" he asked drily.

"You've got me there," she laughed. "But you were so absorbed that you don't seem to have noticed that the shade has gone off this side of the shed long ago. Why, the sun's coming down full upon you."

"Is it? Why, so it is," he said, rising. "I suppose I didn't notice it because I'm so used to it. Lovely morning though."

"Isn't it? Well, I want you to do me a favour, Mr. Greenoak. Will you?"

"Certainly. I shall be delighted."

"But you don't know what it is yet."

"I know that you would not ask me, or anybody, to do what is absurd or impossible."

"Thanks, that's quite pretty, really it is. I thought you up-country men never went in for making compliments."

"Mayn't we tell the truth? That is only straightforwardness, you know."

"There is another compliment," laughed the girl. "Why, Mr. Selmes himself could hardly go on piling them up like that."

"Ah, he's young. They come more naturally from him, like the difference between the roll of a well-greased waggon wheel and that of a creaking one," rejoined Greenoak, with a good-natured smile.

"Now that's a delightfully quaint and characteristic simile," laughed the girl. "I must really store it in mind for future use."

"Is it worth it? But aren't we getting a bit off the road? What is this 'favour'?"

"I want you to take me for a walk, if you have nothing better to do—or think about," she added mischievously.

"If I were to say 'How could I have?' you would tax me with making compliments again, I suppose. But wouldn't you rather ride?"

"No. Sandy's a bit lame, and Bles is away down

the kloof, and by the time he was got up I should have lost all inclination to do either. And there's no other horse on the place that'll stand a skirt. We'll take the path by Goba's vee-kraal to Bromvogel Nek. There's a lovely view from there, and this is just the day to sit and enjoy it."

"When will you be ready?"

"I'm ready now if you are. Are you? Well then, come along."

Hazel chatted briskly as they took their way along the winding and somewhat stony bush-path, but her companion said little. He preferred to hear her talk. There was that in the light-hearted gaiety of this bright, sweet-natured child that appealed powerfully to the strong, lonely, self-contained man, that almost made him sigh for his past youth. He liked to hear her talk, and simply talk. That in itself was a pleasure to him. At the same time he was wondering with what object she had persuaded him to accompany her; the last thing in the world that would have occurred to Harley Greenoak being that it was simply for the pleasure of his own company. He supposed she wanted to talk about Dick Selmes, to "draw" him perhaps, as to his charge's general character. Well, if that were so, Dick should have a good one. And, as though to fit in with the idea, at that moment, from the further side of the great crater-like hollow that constituted the bulk of Hesketh's farm, there

rolled forth a distant and double report. Both stopped to gaze in the direction of the sound.

"Wonder if Dick's getting any luck," said Greenoak. "It's astonishing how his keenness in that direction has thawed off of late," he added slily.

"Yes, it has," came the ready answer. "He's getting quite lazy. In fact, I sent him out to hunt this morning, told him if he didn't bring back a bush-buck ram I shouldn't speak to him until he did. He's much too young to be hanging about the house all day."

With this sentiment Greenoak agreed, but—was that the speaker's only object? Well, it would come out in time.

"For all that he's a thorough sportsman, and as nice a young fellow as ever lived," he said.

But Hazel did not take this opening. She plunged into other topics as they resumed their way; in none of which did the absent and venatorial Dick by any chance come in.

They passed the vee-kraal, where a wheezy and decrepit cur came forth and huskily vociferated at them—Hesketh would not allow any of his "hands" to keep an able-bodied canine on the place—and the two wives of the absent herd, profusely anointed with red clay, came out to greet them and requisition tobacco. Greenoak gave them some, as they knew he would.

"I suppose you can manage Kafirs thoroughly?" said Hazel as they walked on.

"Well, I've had to do it all my life."

"Of course. What an idiotic question! Fancy my asking it *you*. But I don't know whether I like them or not. I don't see much of them."

"No, I suppose there aren't many round your father's place. Mostly Hottentots?"

"Yes. But I don't like them at all. By the way, Mr. Greenoak, do you think we are going to have a Kafir war? The newspapers all seem to say we are. What is your opinion?"

"Newspapers must say something. I can't form any opinion—as *yet*. I may be going up to the Transkei soon, and then I'll be in a better position to do so."

"Soon? Then you won't be here much longer?"

Greenoak's quick ear caught a shade of disappointment in the tone, almost of consternation. Then Dick's departure would cause a blank; for of course she knew that the two were moving about together.

"You must remember we've been here a good while already," he answered, "and there's such a thing as wearing out one's welcome. Besides, I want to show the young one some further sides of the life of the country."

"No fear of your wearing out anything of the kind here," rejoined Hazel, quickly. "As for the other

consideration, well, that counts for something, I suppose. Here we are."

Their uphill progress was at an end. They had reached a high, stony neck, or saddle, between two great crags. In front the slope fell abruptly away for over a thousand feet to a spread of rolling plains, sparsely bushed, and extending for miles and miles. Here and there, at long intervals, a thread of smoke, rising from homestead or native kraal, ascended, but for an immensity of distance the expanse lay, monotonous in its green-brown roll, intersected, in darker line, by the willow-fringed banks of a nearly dry river-bed. Beyond, in the clear atmosphere, seeming about twenty miles distant, though fully fifty, rose mountain piles, flat-topped, in massive walls, or breaking off into turreted cones. Northward others, more distant still, floating apparently in mid-air, owing to the mirage-like effect of distance and clearness, but everywhere a sense of grand, open, unbounded space. The far-away bark of a dog, or the disturbed crowing of cock koorhaans, came up out of the stillness. On the side from which they had ascended was the vast, crater-like hollow, the tangle of rugged and bush-grown kloofs, and slopes covered with forest trees rising to lap in wave-bound verdure the grim iron faces of red rock walls and castellated crags. It was a scene that in the balmy yet exhilarating air of the cloudless day one could sit there and revel in for ever.

"You can almost see our place from here," said Hazel. "That kopje just shuts it off, and you wouldn't think it was forty miles as the crow flies. This is a favourite perch of mine. I often used to climb up here."

"Did you drag your uncle up, too?"

"Oh yes. He'd ride though. But he doesn't care a rap for scenery. He'd light his pipe, and in about ten minutes be fast asleep."

"I'll light mine, but I promise you I won't go to sleep."

"No, don't. You must talk to me instead. Tell me some of your experiences. You must have had so many, and such wonderful ones."

Harley Greenoak laughed deprecatorily. This formula was so frequent wherever he went that it had become stereotyped. As a rule it annoyed him; now, however, it was hard to connect such a word with the owner of that sparkling face, of the wide, lustrous, almost admiring eyes turned upon his own.

"One can't spin yarns to order," he said. "If something suggests one, out it comes—or doesn't."

CHAPTER X

DRIFT

She made no answer, at first. They were in shade now, and she had flung off her sun-bonnet, and her glance was turned forth upon the wide veldt lying beneath, while the light breeze stirred the little escaped rings of her dark hair. No wonder he had found it difficult to get his charge away from Haakdoornfontein, thought the only spectator. The thought was quickly followed by another. Was he so unaffectedly anxious to get away from it himself? Well, why should he be? This bright, beautiful child had brought such sunshine into their daily life, why should he not enjoy his share of it simply because he was no longer young? Harley Greenoak had a strong sense of the ridiculous. Now he saw himself, rough, middle-aged, rapidly turning grey, and secretly he laughed; but it was a laugh not altogether free from wistfulness.

"What an experience yours must have been!" she went on. "I suppose you can't even count the number of people whose lives you have saved?"

"I never tried—er—and excuse me, Miss Brandon,

but—you didn't bring me up here to make me brag, did you?"

"To make *you* brag?" she repeated. "That would be a feat—one that I don't believe any one ever accomplished yet."

"I hope not. I'm only a plain man, Miss Brandon. I don't know that I ever had much education, but I've always held a theory of my own that every one is put into the world to be of some use, and I've always tried to act up to it."

"Haven't you just, and succeeded too? I suppose all South Africa knows that."

The soft-voiced flattery, the glance that accompanied it, were calculated to stir the pulses of even so strong a man as Harley Greenoak, and this he himself realized while striving to neutralize their effect.

"When I was young," he went on, "people used to look on me as a sort of ne'er-do-well, something not far short of a scamp, because I elected for a wandering life instead of what they called 'settling down to something.' Perhaps they were right, perhaps not."

"They were idiots," broke forth Hazel, impulsively.

"I don't know," went on the other, with a smile at the interruption. "Anyhow, I believe in a man taking to what he's most fitted for, and I've lived to know that this is the life I'm the most fitted for. Some might call it an idle life, but if I may say so without bragging, I believe it has been of more service to other

people than if I had launched out in the 'settling down' line of business."

"I should think so indeed," said the girl, her beautiful eyes aglow with sympathy and admiration. Secretly she was delighted. She had made Harley Greenoak talk—and not merely talk, but talk about himself—a thing which, if popular report spoke truly, no one had ever succeeded in doing yet.

"Once I tried farming, but it was no manner of use. The wandering instinct was in my blood, I suppose. Even transport riding—and I was pretty lucky at that while it lasted—was too slow for me. Too much sticking to the road, you see. I've been a little of everything, but"—with a whimsical laugh—"I certainly never expected to turn bear-leader in my old age."

"Uncommonly lucky for the 'bear,'" pronounced Hazel.

"Well, the said 'bear' is apt to get into hot water rather easily. Otherwise he hasn't got any vice."

"And you are apt to get him out of hot water rather easily. Oh, I've heard all about it."

"That was part of my charge. It was all in the day's work. Over and about that, I've grown quite fond of the boy. He's as taking a lad as I've ever known."

Hazel agreed, and promptly turned the subject from

the belauded Dick Selmes to other matters. The while, she was thinking; and if her companion could have read her thoughts—and even his penetration couldn't do that—why, it is possible that he would have run up against the biggest surprise he had ever experienced in his life.

Even so Harley Greenoak was conscious of some modicum of surprise; and that was evoked by the way in which his companion was making him talk—drawing him, so to say—and, somehow, the experience was a pleasant one. Not until afterwards did it occur to him that he had come near being thrown a trifle off his balance by the soft insidious flatteries of this beautiful girl, reclining there in an attitude of easy grace. The warm, sunlit air, the height of space, looking down, as it were, upon two worlds, the free openness of it all was Greenoak's natural heritage, and under no other surroundings could he be so thoroughly at his best. So she led him on to talk, and he had a dry, quaint, philosophical way of handling things which amused and appealed to her immensely. Suddenly the report of a gun, just beneath, together with the cry of dogs hot-foot on a quarry.

"That's Dick. He's worked round to this side of the farm," said Greenoak. "Shall we go down and see what he's been doing, for it strikes me we've been sitting here rather a long time?"

"Oh, you have found it long, then?" with mock

offended air, then colouring slightly as she realized what an utter banality she had fired off for the benefit of a man of Harley Greenoak's calibre.

"No, I haven't," he answered quite evenly. "I've enjoyed the lounge and the talk very much." And then Hazel felt more disgusted with herself still.

"Let's go back to the house," she said. "I believe it's getting rather hot."

She chatted as they wound their way downwards along the bush path, but not so brightly as when they had come up it. Somewhat wonderingly, Greenoak noted that she displayed no interest in the absent Dick. The latter arrived not long after themselves.

"There you are, Miss Brandon, I've redeemed my pledge," he cried. "Got a whacking big bush-buck ram. Do come and look at it."

"Got him just under Bromvogel Nek—eh, Dick?" said Greenoak.

"Yes. But—how did you know?"

"Heard your shot, and the dogs on to something wounded. We took a walk up there, Miss Brandon and I."

"Oh——" And Dick Selmes stopped short, and then thought what an ass he was making of himself. So that was why Hazel had been so anxious for him to go out and hunt! Old Greenoak was coming out of his shell—coming out with a vengeance.

As they went outside Kleinbooi, the Fingo, was in

the act of offloading the quarry. It certainly was a fine ram, but Dick noticed with inward disgust and heart-searching that Hazel seemed to show but little interest in it, or in his own doings. And by this time it had become of very great importance to him that she should feel interest in his own doings.

"What would you say to moving on, Dick?" said Greenoak that afternoon. "We've been here a good while, you know."

The other's face fell.

"Yes, I'm afraid we have," he said. "But where shall we go next?"

Greenoak gave him some inkling of the bearing of the Commandant's letter, and the idea caught on, but with half the alacrity wherewith it would have been received had a certain entrancing young person not been a fellow-guest at Haakdoornfontein.

"When shall we start?" asked Dick, somewhat ruefully.

"How about to-morrow?"

"Couldn't we make it the day after? Come now, Greenoak. A day more or less can't make any difference."

"Well, no more it can—at this stage," was the enigmatical answer. As a matter of fact, in the speaker's inner mind it was an ambiguous one. "We'll break away the day after."

"Going on, are you?" said old Hesketh, when the

announcement was made to him. "Well, I'm sorry. But I suppose our young buffalo hunter's spoiling to get on to bigger game. Where are you trekking for now, Greenoak?"

"The Transkei."

"Ho-ho-ho! You may get on to bigger game there," chuckled the old man, significantly. "Yes, bigger game than ever Slaang Kloof can find you. Think there's anything in these reports, Greenoak?"

"Never can tell. I happen to know there is a simmer stirring all the border tribes. It'll depend on how the thing's handled."

"If Mr. Greenoak has the handling of it, things won't go very wrong, Uncle Eph," interrupted Hazel.

"Now, Miss Brandon, you are either chaffing me or giving me credit for powers of magic which I don't possess," protested the object of this exordium.

"I'm doing neither," replied the girl, confidently.

Dick Selmes restrained an impulse to look quickly up—they were at table. Of late Hazel seemed never tired of booming Greenoak, he told himself, and now all her talks with himself came up. These, somehow, always led round to Greenoak.

He looked with renewed interest at his guide and mentor. The latter was a splendid fellow, as the girl had more than once declared, but—elderly; easily old enough to be her father. Now he, Dick Selmes, had

been coming to the conclusion that life apart from Hazel Brandon was going to be a very poor affair.

The propinquity had done it—that, and the bright, sweet charms of the girl herself. He had been realizing that the time must come when they would have to part, and now that it had come, why, he would put his fortune to the test. Surely it could have but one issue. They had been so much together, long rides, long rambles, or wandering about among the bush solitudes, and they had always agreed so well. She had always shown such pleasure in his company, surely she would accept it for life. And then came the discomforting thought that just of late they had not been so much together. That morning, for instance, she had insisted on him going away from her for half the day, while she rambled off with Greenoak. What did it mean? Poor Dick began to feel very sore, and partly so with Greenoak. Well, he would put matters to the test, and that at once.

But this was not so easy, for the simple reason that he found no opportunity, and did not know how to make one. Hazel was as bright and cordial as ever, but affected to be busy, and there was no means of getting her alone to himself. All the good understanding between them seemed to have evaporated. She was avoiding him—deliberately avoiding him—there could be no doubt about that.

In his soreness and disgust he seized his gun, and

started off on foot. He had not gone far when he heard Greenoak's voice behind him.

"Going alone, Dick? Better not. You seem hipped, man, and I don't think your own company's good for you."

Dick's first impulse was to make an ungracious reply, but he conquered it.

"Yes, it is," he said. "Every one's tired of me now, so I didn't want to bore anybody."

"Well, we'll go and lay up at the *draai* for anything that's moving. But it's early yet."

It was afternoon, and their departure was fixed for the following morning. Dick felt desperate.

"Hang it, Greenoak," he burst forth at last. "You don't know how I hate leaving this place. Had such jolly times here."

"How you hate leaving somebody on this place, was what you should have said. Eh, Dick?"

"Well, yes, if you put it quite so plainly. The worst of it is, I can't get an opportunity of speaking to her alone. Couldn't you manage to make one for me, Greenoak? You can do about everything"—eagerly.

"Not that. Even if I could I wouldn't. My dear Dick, I'm responsible to your father; and I won't help in that sort of thing. You've fallen a victim to propinquity, as many another has done before you, and the best thing for you is to go away—as we are

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going—and see how this—er—fancy stands the test of time and different surroundings. It is evident that the other party to the difficulty is not in a hurry to clench matters, which shows her sterling sense. No. Try my prescription."

This and other wise doctrines did Greenoak preach, and at last his charge became in some measure reconciled to the plan. Anyway, he was not going to make an ass of himself, he declared.

CHAPTER XI

FAREWELL

A MAN who is "good all round," as the saying goes, in weighty matters, is rarely a fool in dealing with those of minor importance, although he is sometimes. In which connection the advice we just heard Greenoak administer to his charge showed sound judgment and a knowledge of human nature.

"The other party to the difficulty is in no hurry to clinch matters," he had said, and it was no more than the truth. Hazel Brandon was gifted with rather more common sense than most girls of her age. She and her young companion had been drawn very much together during their sojourn at this isolated farm, and she had grown very fond of him; but what she doubted was whether she had grown fond of him enough. She knew, of course, how matters were trending, and that she had only to hold up a finger. Yet she kept that finger persistently down.

She was in no hurry to engage herself to anybody. There was plenty of time. She was quite young and

perfectly happy at home, as incidentally and periodically she would remind a remote cousin who pestered her. But she owned to herself that he was not in the same street with Dick Selmes. Yet about the latter there was something wanting, something which, much as she liked him, somewhat failed to satisfy her. Light-heartedness is a valuable gift, but he was too light-hearted; too boyish. He would be the better for some trying experience, she decided, something that would mould his character. Even were she to fall in with the wishes he was seeking opportunity to utter, how could she feel entirely assured that he knew his own mind? She could not so feel, therefore she cut the knot of the difficulty by taking care to give him no such opportunity.

Then again, what about his belongings—his father, for instance? She knew that his position and prospects were unimpeachable; and would it not be said that she had laid herself out to entrap him? There was a decided hardening of the proud little mouth at the thought. She would have no secret or provisional understanding. If he knew his own mind, he knew where to find her when his travels should be over; in her own home to wit. This would cut both ways, for while suspecting him of not quite knowing his own mind in the matter, Hazel candidly admitted to herself that at this stage she did not know hers. She owned she would miss him dreadfully when he left,

but—the point was, would she miss him when she got home again?

That last evening could hardly be pronounced a successful experiment in cheerfulness. Not to put too fine a point on it it was unequivocally dismal. Harley Greenoak was, if anything, more sparing of speech than usual, and old Hesketh was tired. Hazel's heroic attempts at brightening up the situation fell flat. Dick Selmes was gloomy, and inclined to import a note of sentiment into his remarks; and then—his last cable was cut away. He had clung to a hope that he might get Hazel to himself, if only for a few minutes, after the others had retired; but no—she forestalled them, bidding good-night quite unnecessarily early, and before any one else had shown signs of moving.

"Got everything ready, Dick?" said Greenoak, coming into his room. "We start just after sun-up, you know."

"I wish we started now," was the answer, and the speaker savagely kicked his boots across the floor, to the grave peril of a big tarantula prowling along in the shadow against the dilapidated wainscotting. "I hope there'll be a thundering big war when we get up there. I could take on a good deal of excitement just now."

The other laughed pleasantly. "I know you could, Dick, but let's hope we'll get some excitement without the war. Well now, pull yourself together. There

are plenty of good times sticking out in front of you. Good-night."

Dick, left alone, thought what an easy thing it was to give advice. How could an old chap like Greenoak realize what he was going through? he said to himself —losing sight of the possibility of his friend having at one time gone through an exactly similar experience. Ah, well—there was a prospect of excitement ahead—that was one comfort.

Going to the window, he threw up the sash, and the night air, still and cool, penetrated the room. The sky was clear and the stars shone in myriad frosty twinkle, and up from the shaggy forest strips which lined the deep kloofs abutting on the great hollow, came the multifold voices of the creatures of the night, winged or four-footed. Under a cold moon the great crags were visible, and as he gazed forth upon the still vastness of Nature, it seemed to Dick Selmes that every spot on the place carried with it some association. The night reminded him of that similar one down in the Addo, when he had gone forth single-handed to seek adventure—and had found it too, with a vengeance. Since then what an experience had come his way, changing his life completely. Then, chilled by the night air, he closed down the window and turned in.

It seemed hardly five minutes before the entrance of Greenoak told him that it was time to turn out.

There was a sharp, raw nip in the air, although the sky was without a cloud, for the sun was not yet up, and Dick proceeded to dress, hurriedly and shiveringly. He felt altogether depressed. He wished he had never heard of South Africa, and then, even upon his youthful understanding, was borne in the certainty that what had overtaken him here would have overtaken him somewhere else.

As he entered the living-room Hazel was there dispensing early coffee. If only he had the opportunity of being alone with her even now, he thought, but he had not. Already the cart stood inspanned in front of the stoep.

"Well, young buffalo hunter," said old Hesketh. "I shall be sorry to lose you, and if ever you're 'round this way don't forget to look in and help to liven an old man up. You're always welcome for as long as you like to stay. But it's slow work for a young 'un, to be sure."

"That it isn't, Mr. Hesketh," rejoined Dick, heartily, not a little touched by the kindness and real warmth of his host's words. "I've had a rattling good time here, and enjoyed it as well as I've ever enjoyed anything"—with a meaning glance in the direction of Hazel, to which she, however, utterly failed to respond. Bnt perhaps she made up for it in the frank warmth of her farewell.

"Do come and see us at our place, Mr. Selmes,

when you have done your travels," she said. "My father will be delighted, I can answer for that, though we can't give you quite such good sport as you've been having here. Still, you will have a hearty welcome."

Dick mumbled something as he pressed the little hand, longer perhaps than he need have done—and then he had a confused consciousness of climbing to his seat, and in less than no time the homestead at Haakdoornfontein was out of sight.

"Jolly old place," he said regretfully, as he looked back. "Tell you what, Greenoak. I quite hate leaving it."

"I dare say," remarked Greenoak, drily. He was thinking at that moment that his charge was becoming something of a burden. The said charge was thinking of something else, and that "something" evidently something all-engrossing—so much so, that for upwards of an hour he did not utter a word—a very unusual thing indeed for Dick Selmes.

But he was young, and his spirits soon reasserted themselves. Bowling along in the glorious air and sunshine, as each fresh stage passed took them over—to him—new and varying scenes, his temporary gloom was soon dispelled. Harley Greenoak, too, was the ideal kind and tactful companion, and by the time they sighted the beautiful mountain range, the forest-clad rampart beyond which lay Kafirland—Kafirland

with its delightful potentialities of stirring adventure —Dick had quite recovered his old light-heartedness. Yet this was in a measure sobered, tempered, by the recollections of one whom he had left behind him.

"Well, girlie," said old Hesketh to his niece, after the departure of the guests. "We shall miss the young 'un—eh? You'll be dull now with only an old fogey to put up with."

"Have I been dull before, Uncle Eph?" answered the girl, slipping her arm through his. "And I think this isn't the first time I've had 'only an old fogey to put up with.'"

"No, it isn't. Well, young to young—that's the rule of Nature, and he is a fine young fellow that. I never saw a young 'un I took to so much."

And old Ephraim Hesketh suddenly found himself being very much kissed.

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CHAPTER XII

OF A FIGHT

"RATHER different sort of country this—eh, Dick?"

"Yes. But the worst of it is there's nothing to shoot."

"There never is where there are Kafir locations," rejoined Harley Greenoak.

On either side of the road lay spread the green, undulating plains of British Kaffraria, open, or dotted here and there with mimosa. The sky, dazzling in its vivid blue, was without a cloud, and the air of the winter midday warm and yet exhilarating. The Cape cart had just left behind the steep slope of the Gonubi Hill, and was bowling along the Kei Road, facing eastward.

"Think the Kafirs really do mean to kick up a row, Greenoak," said Dick, as three ochre-smeared samples of that race strode by, favouring those of the dominant one with a defiant stare.

"I'm dead sure of it. You see, they haven't had a fight for nearly a quarter of a century, and now they're spoiling for one. I didn't care to say so while

we were down in the Colony though, for fear of setting up a scare. It's simply the Donnybrook spirit. This squabble about the Fingoes is a mere pretext."

"Well, I'm jolly glad," rejoined Dick Selmes. "It would have been a proper sell to have come all this way and there to be no war after all."

"Sell? I'm hoping that same sell may be ours."

"What? You're hoping there'll be no war?"

"Certainly. Think what a row I should get into with your dad for countenancing your taking part in it, Dick."

"Oh, don't you bother about that, old chap," was the breezy rejoinder. "Didn't the dad leave me here to see all there was to be seen, and if there was a jolly war and I didn't see something of it, why, I shouldn't be seeing all there was to be seen? Besides, I've seen nothing of the Kafirs yet."

"You'll see enough and to spare of them directly. Meanwhile you're about to begin, for here we are at Draaibosch."

Our friend Dick had about recovered his normal spirits, the enjoyment of travel, the ever-changing novelty of it at every turn, and the prospect of excitement ahead had done that for him. But he could not banish the recollection of that bright, sweet personality from his mind, nor had he any wish to. When he had done with his experiences he would find out Hazel Brandon in her own home, and would speak

out boldly and in no uncertain manner. Meanwhile, advised by common sense and Harley Greenoak, he decided to make the best of things at present, and to let the future take care of itself.

As they topped a rise the wayside inn and canteen came into view just beneath. Before the latter squatted or lounged in groups quite a number of red-blanketed figures, and the deep bass hum of their voices, and an occasional laugh, rose not unmelodiously upon the still air.

"Well, MacFennel, and how's trade?" said Greenoak, shaking hands with the innkeeper, who had come out to meet them.

"Oh, so so. What's the latest thing in scares?"

"You ought to know that better than me. You're nearest the spot."

"All the more reason why I shouldn't. More than half these scares are cooked up down in the Colony. We don't hear much of 'em up here."

"That won't be good news for my young friend there"—with a nod in the direction of Dick Selmes, who had strolled away to inspect nearer the groups of Kafirs by the canteen. "He's just spoiling for a war."

"Haw—haw!" guffawed the other. "But who is he?"

Greenoak told him, and just then Dick returned.

"Faugh!" he exclaimed. "Those chaps *are* a bit 'strong' when you get too near them."

"Yes, stale grease and red clay don't make a fragrant combination," laughed Harley Greenoak. "I hope you can get us some dinner directly, MacFennel; for I can tell you we both feel like it."

"Yes, it's ready now. Come on in. Bring the shooters inside. It isn't safe to leave them in the cart with all these loafers about."

The while they had been outspanning, and now, handing over the horses to a native stable-boy, they entered.

"I say, what about the war?" said Dick to the hotel-keeper, as the latter came in to see how they were getting on. "Think there'll be one?"

"Well, Mr. Selmes, I don't know what to say. But one can only hope not."

Dick dropped his knife and fork, and stared.

"Hope not?" he echoed. "But think what a lot of fun we shall be done out of."

The hotel-keeper laughed good-naturedly.

"Fun?" he said. "Well, it may be fun to you, but it'll be death to some of us, as some fable-mongering feller said about something else—I forget what. It may be all very well for young gentlemen with plenty of money, wandering about the world on the look-out for excitement; but for us ordinary chaps who've got to make a living—and not an easy one at

that—it spells anything but fun I can tell you. What price my place being sacked and burnt to the ground some fine night? I've got a wife and kiddies too—what if we didn't get long enough warning to clear them off to Komgha quick enough? Well, that's what war spells to us."

"By George! I never thought of it in that light," cried Dick Selmes, to whom the other's quiet but good-natured reproof appealed thoroughly. "But—surely you'd get warning in time, wouldn't you?"

"Warning. Look at those chaps out there"—designating the groups of Kafirs, now momentarily increasing, in front of the canteen, some of them visible from the window. "Some fine day they come along just as you see them now, only with business-like assegais hidden under their blankets. Then, a sudden signal and a rush, and—where do we come in? Kafirs don't give warning, they take you on the hop; ain't I right, Greenoak?"

Greenoak nodded. Dick Selmes was conscious of feeling rather small. Just then, as though to emphasize the hotel-keeper's remarks, a considerable hubbub arose outside, voices were raised—many of them, and all talking at once, and through them running a note of anger; and a lot of angry and excited Kafirs all talking at once *are* capable of raising a very considerable hubbub indeed.

"Why, they're going to have a row, I do believe,"

cried Dick, springing to the door, and looking out. But MacFennel never turned a hair.

"Oh, it's only some feller got too drunk in the canteen," he said. "Been chucked out by my assistant. It often happens, but they blow off steam in no time."

In this case, however, no such safety-valve seemed to be in working order. A rush of excited Kafirs surged round the further end of the building. Blankets were thrown off, and with a tough kerrie in each hand, they fell to. Shouts and vociferations, the clash and splintering of hard wood, and the more sickening crunch, as the latter fell in upon skull or shoulder—the moving mass swayed and leaped. At the same time, as though magically evolved, lines of Kafirs, some mounted on rough ponies, some afoot, came pouring along the hillside, shrilling war whistles or uttering loud whoops, and, arriving on the scene of action, flung themselves into the fray with a whole-heartedness that left nothing to be desired. The fight became one roaring general *melée*.

"It's only a faction rumpus," said the hotel-keeper, who had dived into an inner room to arm himself with a revolver, which, however, he didn't show. "Sandili's and Ndimba's chaps are always getting 'em up. Rotten for me too, for it gives my place a bad name."

The stoep, railed off, stood about four feet above the ground. In front the said ground, perfectly open,

sloped away gently to a *sluit*, constituting a first-rate arena for a rough-and-tumble. Round on to this now, the warring savages swirled, mad with fury and blood lust, some with drink. The three white men—four now—for they had been joined by MacFennel's assistant, who had prudently locked the canteen door—stood on the stoep watching the tumult.

"How about the rifles, Greenoak?" said Dick Selmes, in hardly to be repressed excitement.

"No. We mustn't show sign of scare," was the quiet answer. "We've got our pistols, but we needn't show them unless absolutely necessary."

The struggling crowd now had broken up into groups. No attempt at forming sides had been made, twos and threes they fought, and as soon as one individual went down the victors proceeded to batter the life out of him as he lay, unless others sprang to the rescue, which was often the case. Then there would be a renewed scrimmage, with slashings and parryings, and soon the ground was scattered with writhing, struggling bodies, and others, indeed, deadly still; the while the strident war whistles rent the air. Black, striving demons, eyes blazing and white teeth bared, seemed to have taken the place of the careless laughing groups of a few minutes ago.

On the left, some thirty yards away from the stoep, where stood the white spectators, was a small orchard, bounded by a low sod wall. For this, one Kafir, hardly

pressed, was seen to make, with three others hot on his heels. He gained it, but his foot caught, tumbling him headlong into the ditch on the other side. With a yell his pursuers were on him, and although the spectators could not see him, the nasty crunch of the knobkerries battering out his brains and his life, told its own tale. Dick Selmes, who had never seen any real bloodshed before, began to feel rather sick.

"Can't we stop this, Greenoak?" he said, rather quaveringly, as a big savage, hotly pursued by four or five others, came staggering up to the stoep itself, to fall, almost at their very feet, the blood pouring from a wound in his skull.

"It's their own quarrel," answered Greenoak, decisively. But paying no heed to the words, the impetuous Dick had sprung down the steps and was standing over the prostrate Kafir, his revolver pointed.

"Stand back, you cowardly dogs!" he roared. "Hit a man when he's down, would you? I'll let daylight into you."

Of this they understood, of course, not one word. But there was no sort of misunderstanding the pointed pistol, the flashing eyes, and the pale, determined face of the young Englishman. Growling, ferocious, like the disappointment of hungry beasts, they halted—calling to those behind them. Many of those swarmed up, kerries raised. This was no white man's business, they roared. Let the white men interfere and they would

kill the lot. All of which, of course, Dick Selmes, for his part, did not understand one word. But Harley Greenoak did.

Quickly he called out to them in their own tongue, urging that it was not worth while their losing many lives for the sake of one, which in all probability was already gone; that they themselves were well armed, and that Dick Selmes would certainly never be frightened into giving way; and further, that the sound of firing would be sure to bring the Mounted Police down upon them.

For a moment his words seemed to produce the desired effect, then a roar of defiance went up from those further back. The savages were in an ugly and dangerous mood, and their fighting blood was roused. They were armed only with sticks it was true, but they had already demonstrated what a formidable weapon an ordinary hard-wood kerrie can be in the hand of one who knows how to use it; and there were upwards of a hundred of them on the ground already, while more and more were still pressing up along the veldt paths. They seemed to have laid aside their mutual feud, and now with a scowl of hate and defiance upon each grim countenance they crowded up before the white men. And these were but four.

Harley Greenoak had his finger upon the pulse of the crowd. His keen glance in particular took in the expression of those nearest to Dick. His hand was

closed round the butt of his revolver, but not yet had he drawn it. The while Dick, still pointing his, stood over the fallen man, his eyes upon the savage threatening faces which fronted him, but shining from them the steeliness of a deadly determination.

CHAPTER XIII

TYALA

THERE followed a moment of tense silence. Then a fresh hubbub arose on the outskirts of the crowd, quite a number of which broke away, and made for the lower end of the building. Harley Greenoak and MacFennel's assistant looked at each other. Both had caught the proposed new move.

"I'll take care of this, Mr. Greenoak," said the latter, a rough and ready, powerful young fellow who understood the Kafirs and their language as one of themselves. "Burn the house, will they? We shall see."

He dived inside. Hardly had he done so than a change seemed to come over the fierce and threatening crowd. Anxiously the savages looked this way and that, then broke into groups, conversing more quietly. The electricity of the storm seemed to have spent itself. Harley Greenoak still stood leaning on the railing of the stoep in easy attitude—he had, as yet, shown no weapon. Probably a patrol of Mounted Police had appeared in sight, was the thought in the minds of the others.

There was a thud of horse-hoofs approaching from behind the house, and then—— No squad of mounted troopers appeared, only a single Kafir, an old man, riding a sorry-looking and under-sized pony. At sight of him the mass of hitherto turbulent savages murmured respectful greeting, and a rush was made to hold his stirrup while he dismounted.

"You can put away your pistol now, Dick," said Harley Greenoak's quiet voice.

"Why? Have the Police turned up?" answered Dick, as he obeyed. It was significant of the absolute reliance he placed on Greenoak's lightest word in such matters that Dick Selmes never dreamed of disputing any one of his pronouncements.

"No. Better even than that. Tyala has."

"Who's Tyala? Is he a chief?"

"Yes, and one of Sandili's principal councillors. It's a thousand pities he isn't in Sandili's place."

The old man had dismounted now, and was haranguing the assembled Kafirs, such of them as were left, for quite half of the original rioters had melted away. Here was a thing to have happened, he told them. Children of the Great Chief to fall to rending each other like quarrelsome dogs, and that under the eyes of white men; just now, too, when it behoved them to stand well in the eyes of the white man.

This deliverance, however, was not exactly popular. Even the rank and venerable age of the speaker could

not repress a ripple of resentful muttering. White men? Mere dogs, dogs whom they would soon send howling back to their own kraals—was the gist of it. But the old chief continued his rebuke. Let them go home, he concluded, if they could not behave otherwise than as half-grown boys.

"I see before me, my friend, Kulondeka," he added. "Now I am going to talk with a *man*."

"Kulondeka"—meaning "safe"—was the name by which Harley Greenoak was known to all the Bantu tribes south of the Zambesi. The latter greeted the old chief with great cordiality, and in a moment they were deep in conversation.

"I say, I rather like the look of that old chap," said Dick Selmes, who had skipped up on to the stoep again—he had clean forgotten his late *protégé* now. "Hanged if I won't stand him a drink. Give him a good big one, MacFennel."

"He wouldn't touch it, Mr. Selmes; no, not if you gave him twenty cows," answered the innkeeper, with a laugh. "He's got such an awful example before him in the shape of his big chief, old Sandili. That old soaker would think nothing of mopping up a whole bucketful of grog, and as much more as you liked to stack under his nose."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Dick. "Well give him a yard of 'bacco instead—no—give him a whole roll, I'll stand the racket."

"Ah, that'll fetch him," said the other, going inside to find the required article.

"I say, Greenoak. Introduce me," sang out Dick. "First time I've seen a chief, and I must have a jaw with him—through you, of course."

The old man, who wore about him no insignia of chieftainship, unless it were a very old and well-worn suit of European clothes, smiled kindly at the young one; and remarked that he must be the son of a very great man in his own country, for he looked it. Then, as Dick handed him the big roll of Boer tobacco which MacFennel just then brought, he fairly beamed.

"Oh, MacFennel, I wish you'd give him a lot of beads and things out of your store," went on Dick, "also on my own account, they'll do fine for his wives. I expect he's got about twenty."

"All right, Mr. Selmes. He may have more though."

"Well, give him a good lot for each one. How many has he got, Greenoak?"

This was put, Greenoak explaining that it was the desire of the son of the great English chief to make a present to each, and in the result it transpired that the old Gaika had less than twenty, but certainly more than one.

So they chatted on, Harley Greenoak not omitting to tell the chief how Dick Selmes had interfered to protect the fallen man at the risk of his own life. The

frontier was in a very disturbed state, and there was no telling what might happen. There was no telling, either, of what service the act might not prove to one or both of them in the fortunes of war, and none knew this better than the old campaigner and up-country man.

The ground was like a regular battle-field. Injured men lay around, unconscious some, and breathing heavily. Others would never breathe again; others, too, recovering from their temporary stunning, were raising themselves labouringly, staring stupidly around, as though anything but sure as to what had happened. Broken kerries lay about, and, here and there, a great smear of blood. Tyala, having filled his pipe from the new and bountiful supply he had just received, lit it and stalked around the scene of the late disorder.

"*Au!* This is not good, Kulondeka," he said. "Some will be punished for this. But the fewest lying here are Ndimba's people. That would seem to tell that ours did not begin the fight."

"That may or may not be, Councillor of the House of Gaika," answered Harley Greenoak, drily. "It may only mean that the Amandhlambe are the better fighters."

"*Whau!*" cried Tyala, bringing his hand to his mouth with a quizzical laugh. "Now, Kulondeka, I would ask where are better fighters than the men of the House of Gaika? Where?"

"Time will show," was the sententious reply. And on both faces was the same dry pucker, in both pairs of eyes the same comical glance. They understood each other.

Then the two talked "dark." Greenoak was anxious to get at the temper and drift of thought of the Gaika clans under the chieftainship of the historic Sandili, all located along the border of the Cape Colony and within the same. Tyala, shrewd and wily, as all native politicians are, was trying to say as much as he could, and yet give away as little. It was a battle of wits. Yet, in actual fact, this chief threw all his influence into the scale for peace.

"*Whau*, Kulondeka, you know the Great Chief, as who, indeed, among all the peoples do you not know?" he said at last. "Well, then, why does not *Ihuvumenté* * act accordingly? You know, and *Ihuvumenté* knows, that the man who has the Great Chief's ear last has the Great Chief. Sandili does not wish for war, but his young men are hot of blood. Yet his 'word' is all-powerful, and the way he will send it forth—for great things are maturing—rests with who has his ear. We are talking, you and I, but what is for four ears is not for more."

"Oh, it will go no further for me," answered Greenoak. And then as the innkeeper appeared, with a great steaming kettle of black coffee, to which, when

* Government.

well sweetened, all natives are exceedingly partial, their conference ended.

The old chief's eyes brightened, as now Dick Selmes began to display before him all the things he intended he should take home with him. There was a new blanket for himself—and for his wives, why, Dick seemed to have cleaned MacFennel's store out of its whole stock of beads. Mouth accordions too, for the delectation of his younger children, shining things in gorgeous red cases—why, the delight in Tyala's household promised to be as widespread as it was unexpected. These were made over for porterage to some of Tyala's tribesmen who were hanging respectfully around, and then the old man got up to go.

"He is young and the son of a great man," he said, smiling kindly at Dick. "Therefore he is generous."

"Well, Dick, you've met your first Kafir chief," said Harley Greenoak, as they watched old Tyala jogging away on his under-sized pony, a group of the late rioters in respectful attendance, some mounted, some on foot.

"Jolly old boy," pronounced Dick, heartily. "Are they all like that?"

For answer there was a laugh. The inquirer had met his first chief; he was destined soon to meet others —men of a very different stamp, and under very different circumstances. Then his question would answer itself.

"Here's a pretty mess," declared the innkeeper,

glancing discontentedly around. "Talk about a battle-field; why, we've got both killed and wounded here."

"Hallo!" sang out Dick. "Why, my chap has mizzled."

It was even so. The man, to protect whom Dick had so impulsively interfered, at the risk of his life—at the risk of all their lives—was no longer to be seen. He must have been only temporarily stunned, and, recovering consciousness, for reasons of his own had taken himself off while their attention had been centred on the old chief.

"Ungrateful beggar," went on Dick. "He might have had the decency to say good-bye to us."

"Probably he didn't know anything of what had happened," said Greenoak. "You must remember he was already unconscious when you put in your oar."

"Oh—ah, I forgot that," rejoined Dick. And then he thought no more about it.

"I think we'll inspan and get on," said Greenoak. "I'll report the affair at Komgha, and they'll send out some police, and the doctor, if he isn't away over the Kei, that is. Well, Dick, we've started you with the sight of a first-class row," he added.

"It just was a first-class one," answered Dick. "But the after effects are a little beastly, eh? Some of these poor devils must be abominably hurt."

"That, of course. But John Kafir, like other

people, if he wants his fun, has got to pay for it. Such of these fellows as the Police scoop up as soon as they get right again will be put in the *tronk* for their share in to-day's racket."

"The mischief they will! Why? It was a fair fight."

"That's all right, Dick. But faction fights, however fair, are not exactly allowed on British territory, which this is. Beyond the Kei it's a different matter."

"We'll go on there, won't we?"

"Oh yes. The best way will be to join some Police patrol. Chambers, the Inspector in command of A. Troop, is in camp at Komgha now, and he'll work it for us if any one can. Mind you, although I'm no scaremonger, it would be rather risky going far into the Gcaleka country just now, just the two of us, and I'm responsible to your dad for your safe return, you know, Dick."

"I say, old chap, suppose we stow that responsibility question for a bit," laughed Dick. "Makes a fellow feel too much in leading-strings, don't you know."

Harley Greenoak said nothing, and the cart being inspanned, they reckoned with the hotel-keeper and took the road again.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BIG GUN PRACTICE

"BANG! Boom!

Rock and frowning krantz rolled back the reverberations in swooping echo as the first seven-pounder spoke, launching its whistling shrapnel across the deep, thickly-bushed valley of the Tsolo River. Hardly had the echoes died away than the second gun spoke.

Simultaneously with its roar, branches and stones were seen to split and fly, on the opposite hillside, some six hundred yards away. Simultaneously, too, a deep-chested ejaculation of wonderment broke from the throats of more than double that number of human beings. But the mere handful of brown-clad, helmeted men stood calm and alert, feeling perhaps a little grim, as they marked the effect of the gun practice upon the ochre-smeared groups which dotted the hillside hard by. More and more Kafirs came hurrying up from near and far, eager to witness the fun of what was to them an entirely new experience. For this was no battle, only a "demonstration" on

the part of the Frontier Armed and Mounted Police, whose recently formed battery of artillery was delighted to have a chance of showing the turbulent inhabitants of the Transkei what they might hope to expect in case of—accidents.

With each successful shot—and the new artillerymen were making wonderfully good practice—a gasp of admiring amazement ran through the entranced spectators like the breaking of a wave on the shore. These had increased till there could not have been less than a couple of thousand, reddening the slopes like a swarm of ants. They were not armed, except with sticks; and without his kerrie a Kafir rarely moves. The Police Commandant had sent word to all the principal chiefs, inviting them to witness the gun drill, and some had accepted. Besides the artillery, there were three full troops of mounted men.

Tall and bearded, his stature and smart uniform and shining sword impressing the savages no less than his calm imperturbability of demeanour, the Commandant stood, among three or four Inspectors. Two others made up the group, and these, old friends of ours—Harley Greenoak and his charge, Dick Selmes. A little way from these squatted a knot of chiefs and councillors, eagerly discussing, in a low hum, the effect of every shot. They were all old or elderly men, differing outwardly in no way from the commonest

of their people. They wore the same red blanket, and some the massive ivory armlet. But the faces of all were remarkably shrewd and intelligent.

"Well, Greenoak, so you couldn't induce old Kreli to show up?" said the Commandant, naming the great and paramount chief of all the Transkeian, and also of the Kafir tribes within the Colonial border. "Even you couldn't manage that, eh?"

"Not even me," was the laconic reply.

"Well, I never supposed you would. He's got a long memory, and that warns him that it may be no safer for his father's son within a white man's camp than it was for his father before him."

"Why? What happened to his father, Commandant?" eagerly struck in Dick Selmes, scenting a yarn.

"Shot—'while trying to escape.'"

"But wasn't he trying to escape?" said Dick, upon whom a certain significant cynicism of tone underlying this remark was not lost.

"I didn't say he wasn't, and history agrees that he was," answered the Commandant, drily. "But then, you see, Kreli can't read history, and wouldn't believe it if he could. So he'd rather be excused coming to see the new Police artillery make very fair gun practice, and I for one don't blame him. Why, there's my old friend, Botmane," he broke off, as his glance rested on the group of potentates above mentioned. Then to an

orderly, "Bring him here, Harris, I must have a talk with him."

"Who's he?" asked Dick.

"One of Kreli's big *amapakati*, or councillors," answered Greenoak. "In fact the biggest."

"Oh!" and he looked with vivid interest as the Kafir, an old man with a pleasant face, rose from his place in the group and strode forward, which interest deepened as he listened to the subsequent conversation. This he was able to do, as the Commandant, though perfectly at home in the vernacular, chose, for reasons of his own, to use an interpreter. But the said conversation was of no political importance, being a mere exchange of compliments, with here and there a reminiscence. The old Kafir expressed unbounded wonder at the gun practice. The white people could do anything—he declared, as he was shown the working of the guns—could kill men as far distant as anybody could see. What was it done with?"

"Show him the powder," said the Commandant.

This was done, and the old councillor dipped his fingers, not without awe, into the black, large-grained stuff. No wonder the guns could shoot so far with stuff like that, he remarked.

"Give him a big handful to take home and show his chief. He can tell him what he has seen to-day," said the Commandant.

Most savages are more or less like children over the

acquisition of a novelty, and now as old Botmane rejoined his brother magnates the whole group of these craned eagerly forward to look at this mysterious and wonderful stuff which he held in the corner of his blanket, and many a deep-toned exclamation of suppressed excitement rose above the hum of animated discussion. The Police looked on in semi-contemptuous amusement.

The practice was over now, and the swarms of red-ochred savages began to melt away; though a goodly proportion remained on the ground to discuss what they had seen. Meanwhile, the Police were mounting for their return march.

With them went Harley Greenoak and Dick Selmes. The bulk of the patrol would return across the Kei to the Colonial side, but A. Troop would remain behind in camp to keep an eye on a particularly unreliable and turbulent chief named Vunisa. The officer in command of this, Inspector Chambers, and Greenoak were old friends, and it was arranged that the latter and his charge should camp with them for awhile.

At that time the Transkei was in a state of simmer, and the same might be said of the tribes inhabiting British Kaffraria. Chiefs were known to be calling in their followers; and this was done by a system that worked with marvellous rapidity. At night mysterious beacons flashed answering messages to each other from this or that lofty hill-top, and it was known that

war-dancing on a real scale was going on in this or that disaffected chief's location; and notably in that of Vunisa, situated in the Gudhluka Reserve. This Vunisa was the chief over an important section of the Gcaleka tribe.

In front of the officers' mess hut in the A. Troop camp, a group of four sat chatting.

"Pity we can't find out something more definite, Greenoak," Inspector Chambers was saying. "I believe I'd be justified in arresting Vunisa on my own responsibility."

Harley Greenoak laughed drily.

"Don't you do it, Chambers. You'd stoke up the whole country then and there. Even if you didn't—what price the Government? Too much zeal isn't encouraged in the Police any more than in other departments, I take it."

The Inspector and his sub. laughed ironically.

"Not much," said the latter. "And these devils are war-dancing every night right bang under our noses. It's genuine too, for I've seen it before, as you know."

"By Jove! I would like to see a real war-dance," struck in Dick Selmes. "I say, Inspector, couldn't some of us go over some night and have a look in? Why not to-night?"

"Tired of life yet, Selmes?" answered Chambers,

good-naturedly. "Because if a few of us went to have a look in at it none of us would come back—in their present state of mind. If a lot—why, there'd be no war-dance."

"Bother!" said Dick.

The conversation rolled on; then came dusk—then dinner. Life in the open makes men drowsy. It was not long before the camp of A. Troop—bar the sentries—was fast asleep.

The night was moonless, but the blue black of the unclouded sky was beautiful with its myriad golden stars, shining as they only can shine in Southern skies. The loom of the hills was perceptibly defined, notably in one direction, where a faint glow brought into relief the V-shaped scarp of converging slopes, constituting, as it were, a portal to the country lying beyond. Hence sounds were borne, distant but indescribably weird. But the Police were accustomed to such by this time. There was war-dancing going on in the Gudhluka Reserve.

We said that the camp was fast asleep. Dick Selmes constituted an exception. Lying on his blanket outside one of the huts—he preferred to sleep in the open for the sake of freshness—he was planning out an extraordinarily mad scheme. Why should he not steal out, make his way over to Vunisa's location, and witness the fun? It would be a chance he might never get again. As for the risk, old Chambers was

probably exaggerating. Even if he were discovered, they wouldn't hurt one man all alone. He would just give them tobacco and tell them to go on with the programme; and, acting on this idea, he rose quietly and stole out of the camp.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

Hang it! He had forgotten the confounded sentry.

"Oh, it's all right, old man," he answered genially. "It's only me, and I'm taking a walk. Here, fill your pipe, I'll be back soon," putting a coin into the man's hand.

Trooper Carter was not one of the best men in the Force, and F.A.M. Police pay was none too liberal in those days. The weight of a sovereign felt good.

"All right, sir. Don't be too long, though."

CHAPTER XV

THE TICKING OF A WATCH

Dick's spirits rose immeasurably as he found himself clear away, with night and the open veldt around him. He was in the pink of hard training, consequently not long did it take to cover the six or seven miles that lay between the Police camp and Vunisa's location.

The Tsolo River rippled silvery across his way, reflecting the stars. Cautiously he forded it, the water scarcely above his ankles, but his heart in his mouth lest he should make any undue splash or cause a rattle of stones. But the din in front had now become so near and deafening that it would have drowned such fifty times over.

He was through the defile now, which was not so narrow as it looked. In front a great red glow as of numerous fires, and all his pulses were a-tingle with excitement and anticipation at the thunder of stamping feet, the roar of the rhythmical chant. But—how get near enough to see without being seen?

He glanced around, then upward. The steep slopes were not very thickly bushed, but, by advancing

carefully and taking advantage of every bit of cover, he might manage to get well above the scene of the rout. Slowly, tediously, he crawled, for the most part on his hands and knees. The firelight, throwing out a dull glow, reached the hill-slopes—what if the white of his face should show up to the keen-eyed savages? And then, as he reached a point whence the whole scene lay revealed before him, Dick Selmes felt that the risk he had undertaken was amply repaid.

Beneath, in an immense open space, several huge fires were burning—their light showing up clusters of round, conical-roofed huts studded all along the valley. But the broad level was covered with human beings, if so weird and satanic-looking a crew could be defined as human. There must have been considerably over a thousand of them, decided the spectator, allowing for those who were taking part in the performance alone; for, on the outside of the actual arena, squatted several rows of women, who formed a not ineffective sort of accompaniment, by a rhythmical clapping of hands, to the war-chant of the warriors. The latter were arrayed in trappings of the most fantastic nature, tufts of cowhair flowing from leg and arm; monkey skins, with here and there that of the leopard; wild-cat tails too, and bunches of crane feathers sticking up from their heads. All seemed bristling with assegais, but there were no shields.

As Dick Selmes took in all this the chant suddenly

ceased, and the entire mass stood in motionless silence. Then one man came forward and harangued them. He was of tall, commanding figure, and the spectator wondered if this was Vunisa, the redoubtable chief, himself. Not long, however, did he talk, but more and more did his speech work up to what seemed to the listener the highest pitch of fierce frenzy. Every head was bent forward, eagerly drinking in every word; and the deep-toned murmurs of assent which greeted some of his periods reminded Dick of those which hailed the successful shooting of the Police artillery, the first time he had seen any large number of savages together.

There was a sudden tightening of the ranks. The orator had ceased. Now arose the rhythmical strophes of the war-song, low at first and fierce, then rising till it reached a perfect roar, terror-striking in the degree of ferocity unchained which it expressed, while the stamp of feet, in perfect unison, shook the ground as it were with the rumble of an earthquake. Then the whole mighty mass moved forward in line, and the light of gushing flames gleamed redly on assegai blades as the foremost warriors went through the pantomime of striking down an imaginary foe. Up and down the great open space this was repeated several times, the rear ranks manœuvring so as to change places with the first and get their turn, in a way that was scarcely perceptible. But—what was this?

For now, behind the surging mass of fantastically arrayed warriors, came a file of women. Each was armed with a tough knob-kerrie, and beat on the ground with a vicious whack now and then during the advance. They were finishing off the wounded after a battle.

For upwards of an hour Dick Selmes lay, witnessing this weird but striking and dramatic scene, in a state of mind little short of entrancement. There was a fascination about it that made him long to rush down the hill and shout and stamp with the rest. No wonder they wanted a strong Police camp in the neighbourhood, he thought, if this sort of thing was going on all over Kafirland; and it struck him uneasily what a mouthful their own particular camp might prove if these and a few more were to hurl themselves upon it while in that state of frenzy. The thought of the camp suggested that it might be high time to think of getting back there.

"Well, I've seen something to-night, and no mistake," he said to himself. "My hat! but I'll have the grin over Greenoak and old Chambers to-morrow."

The flame of the fires blazed up higher than ever. As he turned to carry out his intention, he found his way barred, and that by a line of ochre-smeared, brawny savages. He marked the cruel sneer on each broad, dark face, the gleam of uplifted blades, and then realized his utter helplessness. For, fearing to

wake Harley Greenoak, who would certainly have prevented his mad trip, he had refrained from going into the hut to fetch his revolver. Now he was totally unarmed.

With quick ejaculations the Kafirs hurried forward, some in crouching attitude, like cats advancing on their prey, others erect, but all with eyes fixed warily upon him, for they expected him to draw a pistol. Then they scattered, spreading out so that some should steal above and behind him.

In that moment Dick Selmes knew what it was to feel that his last hour had come. He had no knowledge of the language, so could not try the effect of parley. So, by way of signifying that he was not there with hostile intent, he extended both hands—open.

The effect was magical. Realizing for the first time that he was unarmed, the savages flung themselves upon him. Powerful and in good training as he was, what could he do against numbers? At the same time, a blanket was flung over his head and face, blinding and effectually stifling him in its nauseous folds, and he was borne to the earth and effectually pinioned by many and muscular hands.

Inspector Chambers was an officer of promptitude and decision, and on Harley Greenoak waking him up in the grey of dawn with the news that Dick

Selmes was nowhere in the camp, the sentries of the night before were at once called to account, and the truth came out. The young gentleman was not one of themselves, explained the defaulter, who supposed, therefore, that he was not under the same orders. Ordering the man to be put under arrest, the Inspector gave his directions, and in a surprisingly short space of time nearly the whole troop was mounted and heading at a trot for Vunisa's location.

"That's where we'll find him," pronounced Greenoak, adding grimly, "if we find him at all. He'll have gone to look at that war-dance, sure as eggs. I ought to have known he'd be trying it and kept my eye on him."

Pummelled, pushed, hustled, his hands and arms secured with innumerable knots of raw hide; half suffocated, wholly nauseated by the greasy effluvium of the filthy blanket which still enveloped his head and shoulders, Dick Selmes was hurried down the hill by his captors. To his attempts at speech with them, in the hope that even one among them might understand English, the only reply was a savage growl in their own tongue, accompanied by a dig in the back with the butt end of a kerrie. Still, he did his best to keep his faculties of hearing undimmed, and, listening with all his might, it seemed as though the roar of the war-dance, instead of drawing nearer, became less

marked. Whither were they taking him? All sorts of frontier stories of the old wars which he had heard came back to his mind: of the unsparing barbarities practised by these savages on any unfortunate white man who should fall into their hands; of soldiers, straggling from a column, cut off in the thick bush and slowly roasted to death with red-hot stones, or spread naked over a nest of black ants; of settlers, surprised by the suddenness of the outbreak, driven back to perish in the flaming ruins of their own homesteads. And now he himself was in the power of these very fiends! They were dragging him back to put him to some such end, to delight the whole location with the spectacle of his lingering torments. Shuddering with horror at the thought, the unfortunate fellow hardly noticed whither he was being hurried. Then he was suddenly and roughly flung to the ground, his legs tightly tied together at the ankles, by which he was now seized, and unceremoniously dragged through what he guessed to be the door of a hut.

Once within, a light was struck; the homely match of civilization flaring feebly, but just enough to render more fiend-like still the fell, savage faces and forms decked with their wild war-trappings. This the prisoner was able to make out for a moment, for the blanket which covered his head and shoulders was removed. But only for a moment, for an effectual gag

was forced into his mouth, and then the suffocating, nauseous covering was replaced. After a minute or two of muttered conversation, his captors withdrew.

And now for the unfortunate Dick Selmes followed a night of indescribable horror. To the certainty of being dragged forth at dawn to a death of unimaginable agony was added the torments of the present—the cramping pain of his bonds, the nauseous suffocation of the gag, and the bites of innumerable small pests of no account whatever to the savage, but calculated to drive a highly civilized and utterly helpless white man to the verge of insanity. Rescue! Of that there was no hope. The Police troop might hold its own on the defensive, but, after what he had seen last night, he could not believe it would stand a chance against these fierce warriors fighting on their own ground; besides, he himself would be murdered the first thing. And then he remembered how he of his own act had effectually cut off all trace as to his whereabouts. Even Harley Greenoak would fail to fathom the mystery of his disappearance—until too late. Again and again he bitterly cursed his own rashness.

Then, as the remaining hours of the night wore on, merciful Nature came to the relief of the sufferer, in that he sank into a state somewhat between sleep and unconsciousness, which at length took shape in a dream. The Police troop had come to his rescue. He could hear voices—those of the Inspector Chambers

and Harley Greenoak, mingling with the deeper tones of his savage gaolers. He tried to call out, but could utter no sound. They were withdrawing; still he was perforce dumb. They had gone away. Ah, the agony of it! He strained at his bonds—nearly suffocated himself with the horrible gag. All of no avail.

Very different looked Vunisa's location—now silent in slumber—as the Police rode up, to the weird and stirring scene it had presented throughout the best part of the night, but the yelping and barking of innumerable curs soon brought forth some of its denizens. These stood, open-mouthed with astonishment at the sight of the carbines and revolvers of the Police troopers.

"The chief," said Harley Greenoak, decisively, "Vunisa, the chief. We have a 'word' to him."

Scowling sullenly, the savages began to make the usual excuses. The chief was sick, and so on.

"A lie!" said Greenoak. "Bring him forth at once or we put the torch into every hut in this valley."

By now all were astir. More than half the revellers had gone home, but there were yet an awkwardly large number left, even for nearly a hundred armed and mounted men. Still a hurried consultation went on, then, just as Greenoak was losing patience, the chief himself appeared.

Vunisa was a tall, powerful man, with rather a heavy and sullen face, but not without dignity even then. He had done nothing wrong, he protested; why, then, should the Government send the *amapolise* into his kraal and threaten to destroy it?

"The young white man who came here last night," said Harley Greenoak. "Where is he?"

The chief turned to his followers. What was this about a young white man? Did anybody know? The while, Greenoak, who had dismounted, was watching him keenly. No. Nobody knew.

"Then Vunisa will be arrested," he said.

The chief started, ever so slightly. An ominous hubbub arose among his followers, the bulk of whom dived quickly into the huts again. They had gone to arm.

In a moment they emerged, and the glint of assegai blades and the wave of hard sticks was everywhere, as the kraal became alive with swarming savages, the mutter of deep-toned voices eloquent with suppressed hate and menace. And they outnumbered the Police ten to one.

The latter had loaded with ball cartridge. Even then a sudden rush and the sheer weight of numbers was bound to overwhelm them, out in the open. But it was not made. The Kafirs seemed to hold that little armed force in wholesome respect. Still the merest accident might bring about a collision. The

situation had become tense to dramatic point. What if Vunisa should persist in his disclaimer? There was a moment of dead, boding silence. Harley Greenoak broke it.

"Inspector, kindly send three of your men to search that hut," pointing to one next to that whence Vunisa had emerged. "If the chief moves he will be shot," he added, in the Xosa language.

Amid dead silence the three troopers entered. In a moment, from the interior of the hut, ejaculations were heard; then, through the low doorway there crawled forth a man—hatless, dirty with perspiration and smears of red ochre; in short, with a generally dilapidated appearance. And then up stood Dick Selmes, rubbing his eyes.

"Hallo, Greenoak! Hallo, Inspector, how are you? I say, I'm jolly glad you've turned up. I'm more than a bit sick of spending the night tied up in an old Kafir blanket—faugh!—and not able to move finger or toe."

"You may thank your lucky stars you'd got a watch on, and that there was just a moment of silence *in which I heard it tick*," rejoined Harley Greenoak, gravely.

"Eh?"—puzzled. "That how you found me? Through the ticking of a watch?"

"That—and no other way. It'd be like hunting for a needle to look for you in this location, even if we

hadn't to fight our way out first. Well, your dad was right. You are a record for getting into hornets' nests."

There was no more to be done. Inspector Chambers was not going to take the responsibility of arresting Vunisa simply because this young fool had run his head, as Greenoak had said, into a hornets' nest. So, after reading that potentate a severe lecture, he withdrew his force.

There was another who came in for a sample of the lecture, and that was Dick Selmes. If he chose to hold out his own throat to be cut, he might as well wait until he was on his own responsibility, and so on. To all of which Dick listened very penitently.

"Think they really meant cutting my throat, Inspector?" he said.

"That's just exactly what they did intend," interposed Harley Greenoak. "They were going to cut your throat after we had gone, and then burn the hut over you, so as to destroy all trace."

"The mischief they were! But how do you know, Greenoak?"

"Because I overheard them saying so, as we came away," was the tranquil reply. "They were likewise expressing disappointment at being done out of such a rare bit of fun."

"Ugh, the brutes!" exclaimed Dick, turning in his saddle to scowl back at the dark forms gathered on

the hillside, watching the retreating Police. "I'll pay them out for it when the war begins."

"When the war begins," repeated Inspector Chambers. "Well, it's our particular mission just now to prevent it from beginning at all; but if ever anybody came within an ace of starting it, why, that joker's yourself, this very morning, Selmes. Eh, Greenoak?"

The latter nodded assent.

CHAPTER XVI

MAINWARING'S "GAS-PIPE"

DICK was greatly concerned over the consequences his escapade was likely to entail upon the sentry who had let him through. He said nothing about the bribe, but all unconsciously repeated the man's own line of defence; to wit, that he supposed the defaulter had reckoned that he, being a guest, was free to go and come as he pleased. In short, he gave Inspector Chambers no peace until that good-hearted officer, glad to find a pretext for remitting punishment on anybody, promised to let the man off with a reprimand; but only on condition that Dick, on his part, would undertake not to launch out in any more madcap and foolhardy ventures on his own account while sojourning in the camp.

This act made Dick very popular among the Police, which popularity was consolidated by his free and easy, unaffected way with everybody. He entered with zest, too, into any of the amusements which they got up to vary the monotony of camp life—cricket or athletic sports, or shooting practice; and as he was in the pink of condition, and a fine runner and jumper, it was

seldom that in such he would meet his match. Or if any patrol was sent out, he would not be left behind. His keenness and energy were alike unflagging.

Things seemed to be quieting down. Harley Greenoak, who would sometimes be absent for two or three days at a time, visiting this or that chief—for he could move freely among them, where with another it would have been at that juncture in the highest degree unsafe—reported that there was a more settled feeling. True the Kafir and Fingo locations were eyeing each other from beyond their respective boundaries with distrust, but there was no longer the threatening and aggressive bearing on the part of the one, or the alarmed uneasiness on that of the other. It looked as if matters would settle themselves.

Sometimes two or three headmen from the surrounding kraals would come into the camp and have a talk with the Police officers; and although Vunisa did not make one of them, his people, too, seemed less restless, and no more was the stillness of night broken by the stamp and roar of war-dancing in his location. The green, rolling plains slept peaceful in the radiant sunlight of each unclouded day, and at night a beacon-like flare upon a far-away height might be a grass fire or a less harmless signal.

"What do you think of this as a new thing in blowpipes, Greenoak?" said Sub-Inspector Mainwaring, one day, coming out of his tent with an unusual-looking

weapon in his hand—unusual there and then, at any rate.

Greenoak took it.

"One of these Winchesters. Yes, I've seen them," he said, returning it. "New-fangled American invention. Well, I don't think much of them."

"Why not?" said the other, who was rather proud of his new acquisition. "I've always held that what we want is some sort of repeating rifle. Sort of thing, you know, that can pump in a lot of shots one after another."

"That's all right, if the 'lot of shots' hit," said Greenoak. "If not, one shot at a time's sufficient."

"Well, look at that sardine tin over there"—pointing to one on the ground about seventy yards away, and bringing up the piece.

One shot, and the tin moved; another, and it leapt off the ground; another—a clean miss; likewise a fourth.

"You have a try now," said the owner of the weapon, handing it back to Greenoak.

Up went the piece. One, two, three, four—Greenoak had hit but once. Something of a murmur stirred the group of men who had stopped to look.

"By Jove, old chap, you must be a bit off colour to-day," cried Dick Selmes. Harley Greenoak to miss—to miss anything—however small and at whatever distance, why, that *was* an eye-opener to him, and,

incidentally, to more than one other. Harley Greenoak—to have "his eye wiped," and by a young Police sub-inspector! Why, it was marvellous.

"A bad workman finds fault with his tools," said Greenoak, musingly, as he eyed the weapon, and balanced it critically. "Well, I may be a bad workman, but this is a tool I'm not used to. Wait a second while I get my ·500 Express."

He went into his tent. Several empty sardine tins were lying about.

"Now then, Mainwaring," he said as he reappeared, "chuck up one of those, as high and as far as you can."

The other did so; Greenoak's rifle spoke. The tin went whizzing further into the air. Before it came to the ground another bullet struck it, and sent it skimming along some twenty yards further. A shout of applause went up from the onlookers.

"There you are," said Greenoak, tranquilly. "It resolves itself into a matter of what you're accustomed to. Now, I dare say a lot of practice with that new gas-pipe of yours, Mainwaring, might get one into the way of it. Still, I don't know——" taking the weapon from him and balancing it again. "I don't like the hang of it. The hang seems to leave a lot to be desired."

Then its owner tried some more shots, with fair success, and then Dick Selmes tried some, but

indifferently. The while Harley Greenoak watched the performance narrowly and critically; hardly foreseeing that this repeating rifle was destined to play some important part in the doings of not very far hence.

There were times when Dick Selmes would get low-spirited. There was not much doing just then, as we have said, and at such times his thoughts went back to Haakdoornfontein and its grim but kindly old owner, and more especially, of course, to Hazel Brandon. He had written to her since he left, but to his disappointment had received no reply. Harley Greenoak, who was the recipient of his confidences, as they lay in their hut at night smoking their turning-in pipe, would listen with exemplary patience, and with much kindly tact strive to comfort him; for he had given up urging any objection Sir Anson might entertain on the subject. That must take its chance, he decided. There was nothing to be downhearted about, he declared. The girl wasn't born who would not think the better of him for having borne a man's share in active events, and so he would find when he met her again, and more to the same effect. All of which was vastly comforting to Dick, who would turn in with the last impression that if any fellow were found bold enough to tell him that this world could contain a better chap than Harley Greenoak, why, he would take infinite pleasure in calling that man a liar.

A day or two later two express-riders, dusty and

fagged with hard riding, arrived in camp with despatches. The burden of these set forth with unmistakable plainness that the recent apparent quietude was but the calm before the storm. The plotting and disaffection was all below the surface now, but it was there, and all the more dangerous for that. The Commandant, with two troops of Police and one seven-pounder gun, were marching to the Kangala, a deserted trading store, occupying a useful central position, there to go into permanent camp, and Inspector Chambers was instructed to join him there, with A. Troop, immediately on receipt of the said despatches.

"I say, but this express riding must be a devilish exciting sort of joke," said Dick Selmes, as he looked at the tired and travel-worn men, who stood there waiting, while their officers, having disappeared within the hut, were examining the despatches.

"Don't know about the joke part of it, mister," answered one of them, "but it was exciting enough this morning early. Why, we narrowly missed tumbling into a gang of hundreds of 'em, all bristling with assegais and things. And we shouldn't have missed that if there hadn't been the devil of a fog on at the time. We saw them, but just managed to slip away before they twigged us."

"By Jove! You don't say so. Here—come along to our hut and have a glass of grog. We've got some left, and it'll set you up again."

He had hooked an arm into one of each of them in that boyish impulsive way which had gone so far to build up his popularity with all in the camp. The men stared.

"Well, you are a good sort, whoever you are," said one of them. "But we daren't."

"Oh, it'll be all right. Good old Chambers won't know. He's too much taken up with reading his post."

"Well, we can't do it, sir—at least not until we're dismissed," the man added, rather wistfully. "By the way, is there a Mr. Selmes in the camp? Maybe you're him—are you?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Why, there are letters for you then, with those we've brought. They'll be in there — with the Inspector."

"Hurrah!" cried Dick. "And, I say, you fellows. As soon as you can break loose, don't forget. There's a glass of grog going over there. That's our hut—mine and Greenoak's," pointing it out.

Then Chambers came forth. The men saluted, and retired.

"Letters for you, just come, Selmes," said that genial officer.

Dick fairly grabbed them. Only two, one from his father, the other—— He knew that writing. It was Hazel Brandon's.

We are sorry to say that once within the solitude of his hut—Greenoak was somewhere about the camp—this was the one he opened first. It was in answer to his. It was not particularly long, nor worded with any pretence at style, but it was kind, almost affectionate; dwelling on all the good times they had had together, and reminding him that he must visit them at their own farm when he had got through the more exciting part of his travels. Her people would be so glad to see him—and so forth. And Dick felt as if he were treading on air. Then he read his father's communication, and his heart smote him for not having taken it first. Sir Anson had arrived safe and sound at home again, and was all right. He referred to the rumoured coming troubles in South Africa, and hoped that if he, Dick, came in for any part of them, he would avoid attempting foolhardy feats, or running unnecessary risks, if only because he had an old fool of a father who hadn't yet done with him—and so on. Then there was a lot of home news, and warm remembrances to Harley Greenoak, so that by the time he had done, Dick felt just as soft over this letter as he had felt over the other; and, strange to say, considering his time of life, wondered if he was worth any one taking the bother of thinking about at all.

The bustle outside aroused him to the outer world; for orders had been issued to strike camp immediately,

and begin the march to the Kangala, some five and twenty miles distant. But before the start was made the express-riders got their glass of grog apiece—indeed we dare not swear they did not get two.

"By Jove, Greenoak!" said Dick, as they were hurriedly rolling up their traps. "I would like to have a run across country with these express-riders one of these days. It must be thunderingly exciting."

"Would you? Well, it's likely to be, just soon, if all these accounts hold bottom, and I'm more than inclined to think they do. The Commandant is an old friend of mine, and there's no more cool-headed, intrepid man on the whole continent of Africa. If he's on the look-out, well then it's time other people were. But you'd better leave express-riding alone. Your dad confided you to my charge, remember."

Dick did remember, with his father's solicitous and affectionate letter fresh in his pocket. And yet—and yet—there was at the bottom of his mind a half-fledged lurking determination that he would take his turn at express-riding—if he saw the chance. Two men—or three—darting across a hostile country, bearing with them momentous possibilities—could any situation of adventure hold out anything more alluring? But—he said nothing more on the subject then. Harley Greenoak was sometimes away from camp — on mysterious absences.

CHAPTER XVII

THE EXPRESS-RIDERS

Corporal Sandgate and Trooper Stokes rode forth from the Police camp on express duty.

They were entrusted with very important despatches indeed; to the effect that, owing to the accidental explosion of an ammunition waggon, the large force of Frontier Armed and Mounted Police in camp at the Kangala might, at any moment, find itself alarmingly short of that essential article; and containing urgent injunctions to the authorities in charge of the border post—where an ample supply was stored—to send on a sufficiency of the same, under escort, without a moment's delay.

The two men had been specially selected for this duty. Sandgate was a young Englishman of good family, who, like many a superfluous or younger son at that time, had emigrated as a recruit for the frontier corps, beginning at the bottom. He was a fine, sportsmanlike, athletic fellow, who could ride anything and anywhere, and had soon got his first hoist on the steps of the ladder of promotion. The

other man, Stokes, was a wiry, hard-bitten Colonial, no longer quite young, who had been some years in the Police, but had twice lost his step as corporal owing to an inconvenient hankering after the bottle. When away from its temptations, as in the present case, he was one of the most useful men in the Force. Each, we have said, had been specially picked for this duty; Sandgate for his pluck and dash, and a reputation for readiness of resource which he had managed to set up, Stokes for his knowledge of veldt-craft.

The two express-riders started from the Kangala Camp at moon-rise, which took place early in the evening. It was calculated that, by riding all night, they should reach their objective, Fort Isiwa, not much later than the following midday. They could, by no means, cover the distance in anything like a straight line, nor was there, in many places, anything that could be called a track, which was where Stokes's veldt-craft was to come in: even then their route skirted the turbulent Gudhluka Reserve, whose swarming inhabitants were just then in a particularly dangerous state of simmering unrest, and would as likely as not make short work of a couple of members of a body whom they loved not at all, given an opportunity. Once beyond this danger belt, however, there would be little or no risk, for, after that, the country was sparsely populated, and its inhabitants less disaffected.

So the programme before these two was to push on for all they knew how, so as to get over the more risky portion of their ride under cover of night.

This being the case, it might have seemed a little strange that, having arrived at a point about five miles from camp, where the far from distinct waggon track forked into two, they should have reined in their horses, and sat listening.

"Tell you what, Sandgate," muttered Stokes, cramming a quid of tobacco into his mouth—under the circumstances, for obvious reasons, the pipe must be foregone with stern self-denial. "Tell you what. It's no good our waiting. He won't come. He's thought better of it. Greenoak's likely turned up again and stopped it."

Both men sat for a couple of minutes longer, their feet kicked loose from their stirrups. Then, as they were on the point of resuming their way, a sound caught their ears—the tread of a horse, on the way they had just come over.

"Hallo, you fellows! About given me up, I suppose?" said Dick Selmes in a low, excited tone, as he rode up.

"We were just going to," answered Stokes, who was inclined to be short of speech and a bit sour towards so obvious a specimen of the gilded youth as this one. "And, I say, if you could keep that confounded brute of yours from jingling that swagger

bit so as to be heard all over the Gudhluka Reserve, why, it'd be just as well."

"He'll be all right directly, soon as he's let off a little more steam," said Sandgate, good-humouredly, with a glance of approval at Dick's spirited and well-groomed mount, which, in sheer enjoyment of the fresh freedom of the veldt, was tossing his head and blowing off clouds of vapour upon the cool night air.

That Dick Selmes had been able to join the two express-riders had involved some plotting; for, from the moment he had heard of their errand, incidentally through Inspector Chambers, to whose troop they belonged, he had firmly made up his mind that join them he would. But, on putting this to the Inspector, that worthy had promptly vetoed the whole business—subsequently compromising, however, by suggesting that the matter be submitted to the Commandant.

The latter, however, a fine old frontiersman born and bred, took a different view. He was a reserved, undemonstrative man, but had taken a liking to this dare-devil youngster by reason of his pluck and adaptability.

"I don't really see why he shouldn't go if he's keen on it, Chambers," he said. "The experience will do the young dog no harm, and he seems able to take care of himself. Greenoak keeps him too much in leading-strings. Oh, *that*——" as the Inspector, with

a dry laugh, recalled a certain adventure in Vunisa's location which would have cost our friend his life but for the shrewdness and promptitude of Harley Greenoak. "Well, yes. But, on the whole, Sandgate and Stokes are thoroughly reliable men, and will keep him in order. Of course, I need know nothing about it officially, nor need you; but if he should find his chance of slipping away after them, why, after all, he's only our guest here, and can come and go as he chooses," concluded the Commandant, with a twinkle in his eyes.

Harley Greenoak was away upon a critical and delicate mission which he had undertaken as a personal favour to the Commandant. As things were at present, he argued, his charge could come to no harm, at any rate for a day or two, by which time he himself would be back. All of which accounted for the comparative facility wherewith Dick had slipped away —a facility which struck our two express-riders as strange.

Something of a friendship had grown up between Dick Selmes and Corporal Sandgate. They were of the same age, had the same tastes, and, hailing from adjacent neighbourhoods in the Old Country, had acquaintance in common. On such they chatted in subdued tones, as they held on their way rapidly through the calm beauty of the African night. So far the said way was easy, as under the unerring

guidance of Trooper Stokes they crossed each rolling upland, mimosa-dotted and grassy. Here and there, far away, the mysterious dimness was relieved by the red glow of a grass fire, or might it be the weird signal of plotting savages? Soon, however, the ground became more rugged. They forded a small river, rippling deep down in a thickly bushed valley, and the steeds drank gratefully of its cool, if slightly brackish, water. Then on again.

"We must swing back again here," said Stokes, as they drew rein on top of a ridge to loosen the girths and give the horses a quarter of an hour's rest and feed. "There are kraals in front of us. I can smell 'em."

"The deuce you can?" said Dick, vividly interested. "I can't. You're not getting at us, old chap, are you?"

To this Stokes vouchsafed no reply. He stroked his thick, wiry beard, looking unutterable contempt.

They resumed their way, sometimes making a considerable *détour* to avoid suspicious neighbourhood. Once the barking of dogs, alarmingly near, caused a thrill of anxious excitement. Had the tramp of their horse-hoofs been heard? they wondered, as they swerved off as noiselessly as possible. At last, what looked like a building loomed in front of them. Just behind it were three or four native huts.

"I thought so," exclaimed Stokes. "Blamed if

this isn't old Shelbury's store. We've come a *leetle* more out of our road than we need have done, Sandgate."

"We'll make it up. I say, hadn't we better off-saddle and have some grub?" suggested Dick Selmes, cheerfully.

Stokes looked at him sourly.

"Grub!" he echoed. "You'll get none o' that here. Any fool could see that Shelbury's cleared. Why, the place is all stove in and the whole show looted."

Closer investigation proved such to be the case. The door hung on one hinge, and seemed very much battered.

"We'll push on," said Sandgate, with an anxious glance at the moon, now getting low. "The further we do that under cover of night the better."

But Stokes, rapping out something about just taking half a squint inside, and catching them up again in a jiffy, was already off his horse. The other two, resuming their conversation about old times and scenes at home, held on the way he had pointed out to them. So taken up were they that it was quite a little while before it occurred to them that it might be advisable to pull up and wait for Stokes. Nor had they long to wait.

"Just as I thought," he said, coming up. "The whole shoot has been cleared from top to bottom.

You never saw such a mess in your life. But there's no one dead inside."

As they rode on, neither Sandgate nor Dick noticed that Stokes kept rather behind. The moon, too, had almost sunk, wherefore, perhaps, they further failed to notice that his tan-cord uniform jacket bulged.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ORDEAL

It was just the dark hour before dawn when Sandgate called a halt.

"We might safely do half an hour's snooze here," he said. "The gees want that amount of rest. You turn in, Selmes, and I'll do horse-guard. No—no—don't wrangle, man; each minute of that means so much less hard-earned snooze; besides, I'm in command here. Stokes, you look done too. Well, off you go, both of you."

The latter, with a cavernous yawn, was off like a log. Dick, with a sleepy laugh, followed suit. Then Sandgate, loosening the girths, but not off-saddling, allowed the horses to graze, their bridles trailing on the ground, and set to work to watch.

The place in which they had halted was among some broken rocks, a small hollow, in fact, and admirably adapted for a hiding-place. The back was overhung by boulders, and in front, beyond a lip of the same, the ground fell away in a rugged slope to the bottom of a deep bushy kloof. To

Sandgate, left to his lonely vigil, that brief half-hour seemed long enough. To the other two, heavy in slumber, it was as a flash.

"Now then, Selmes. Time," he whispered, with a hand on the other's shoulder. In a trice Dick was up, but yawning pathetically. He shivered too, for a thin damp mist was stealing athwart the rocks and bush sprays.

"All serene," he said, ready and alert. "Kick up the other fellow."

But although this was done, and that literally, for all the effect it produced Stokes might as well have been dead, or a bit of timber. And then, as an acrid fume rose poisonous upon the cold morning air, Sandgate stood aghast with wrath and horror. His colleague and subordinate was drunk—dead drunk.

Yet how? In a moment something of the truth flashed across his brain. That wretched trader's store they had passed! Stokes must have found grog in there, which had been overlooked by the plunderers. His cursed instinct had moved him to go inside and explore. There was no sign of any bottle about Stokes, certainly, but this he would have been *slim* enough to drop unseen and unheard. Now the mystery of his lagging behind stood explained.

"Great Scott! And the despatches!" exclaimed Sandgate, horrified.

"Take 'em on, and leave him here to get sober," suggested Dick. "He deserves it."

But Sandgate objected to deserting a comrade in dangerous country. He himself would be reduced to the ranks, of course, kicked out of the Force most likely, but he could not abandon a comrade. To this Dick suggested that he should remain with Stokes while Sandgate rode on.

"That won't do either, Selmes," said the latter, gloomily. "You're new to this country, and in my charge. No—that won't do."

"But think of the vital importance of the despatches," urged Dick. "This fellow has brought it all upon himself. Besides, he's supposed to know his way about better than both of us put together. So *I* say, let him take his chance."

"We'll have one more try," said Sandgate.

They had, and it was an exhaustive one. They shook and hustled the stupefied man, and threw in his face what little water remained in their bottles. In vain. Stokes merely gave an inarticulate grunt, and subsided into deep slumber again. Then they tried another plan—that of placing him on his feet by main force. Still in vain. The drunken man slid to the ground again, and in their efforts to keep him up both Sandgate and Dick lost their balance, stumbled, and fell with him.

Before they could rise several pairs of muscular

hands had gripped each of them, and bulky forms pressed them down. So effectually were they pinioned that they could not even reach their revolvers, which were promptly reft from them. The little hollow which was their resting-place was swarming with Kafirs, who had stolen upon them like snakes what time their attention was taken up endeavouring to restore consciousness to Stokes; even the warning which should have been conveyed by the alarmed snorting and restiveness of the horses had escaped them. They were absolutely in the power of these savages, who had surprised and captured them without giving them an opportunity of striking a blow in defence of their lives, and, to one of them, of his trust.

The first thing their captors did was to bind them securely with the *reims* cut from their horses' headstalls. Then a hurried consultation began among them. A man who seemed in authority—a tall, evil-looking ruffian—issued an order. The unconscious Stokes was seized and roughly turned over, face uppermost. A moment's examination sufficing to satisfy them that he was hopelessly drunk, half a dozen assegais were driven through his body, as coolly as though his murderers were merely slaughtering a sheep; while his comrades lay sick with horror at the sight, and justifiably apprehensive as to what their own fate was destined to be.

They had not long to wait. Under the hurried

directions of another man, a short, thick-set Kafir—not the one in seeming authority—they were subjected to a quick but exhaustive search, when, of course, the despatch to the officer commanding at Fort Isiwa came to light.

"This—what it say?" said the short Kafir, in very fair English, tapping the document, which he held open by one corner.

"Oh, it's merely a letter asking for a few more horses to be sent on to Kangala," answered Sandgate, with as much coolness as he could assume.

"That a lie!" was the prompt response. Then, threateningly, "Read that—out, so I hear it."

"If you can talk English, surely you can read it," answered Sandgate.

"Read it! Read"—thrusting the paper before his face. "Read—or——"

"Or what?"

"That," said the Kafir, pointing to the body of their murdered comrade, which the savages had already stripped, and which lay, a hideous and gory sight enough to strike terror into the survivors. But these were of the flower and pick of their nationality, and to neither of them did it for one instant occur to purchase his life by a revelation which might result in calamitous, even appalling, consequences. To both the moment was one which had reached a point of critical sublimity, as they took in the barbarous forms, the

ring of cruel countenances, the dark, grisly hands grasping the ready and murderous assegai. Both were staring Death in the face very closely.

"Well, I shan't read it," said Sandgate, decisively.

"Nor I," echoed Dick Selmes.

At a word from the English-speaking Kafir, a powerful, ochre-smeared ruffian seized Sandgate by the chin, and, jerking back his head, laid the sharp edge of an assegai blade against his distended throat.

"Now—will you read?" came the question again.

The natural fear of death, and that in a horrible form, brought the dews of perspiration to the unfortunate man's brow, as the evil savage, whose hand quivered with eagerness to inflict the final slash, actually divided the skin. Yet, looking his tormentors steadily in the face, he answered—

"No!"

The man in authority said a few words. The assegai blade was lowered, and Sandgate's head was released.

"Now," went on the English-speaking Kafir, "we not kill you—not yet. We try hot assegai blade—between toes. That make you read, hey?"

And even as he spoke a fire was in process of kindling, which a few minutes sufficed to blow up into a roaring blaze.

If the imminence of a horrible form of death had been appalling to these two, it was nothing to this.

Should they be able to stand firm under the ghastly torture that awaited, the very thought of which was enough to turn them sick? And yet—the issue at stake! The war-cloud, though brooding, had not yet burst; but did it get to the knowledge of their enemies that the only force which overawed them, and to that extent held them in check, was short of ammunition, why, the effect would be to let loose tens of thousands of raging devils, not only upon that force itself, but upon the whole more or less defenceless frontier. This was in the minds of both, as quickly Sandgate's boot was cut from his foot, while one fiend, who had plucked a red-hot blade from the fire, stood, eagerly awaiting his orders.

"Now—will you read?"

"No!" shouted Sandgate, his eyes staring at his questioner in horror and despair. Then followed a long and shuddering groan, and in it, and the convulsive writhe of the victim, Dick Selmes seemed to share. His comrade's agony was his own.

At a sign from the English-speaking Kafir the instrument of torment was withdrawn.

"First taste," he said grimly. "This go on all day. How you like that? Now—you read?"

"No!" thundered the victim.

Then something else thundered. Crack! Crack! The barbarian with the hot iron pitched heavily forward, shot through the brain, while another of those

holding Sandgate shared the same fate. Crack! Crack! Not a moment of interval—down went two more, and those immediately next to the prisoners; then two more in the same way. Instinctively the others sprang back, realizing that this was the point of danger; but still that unceasing fire went on pitilessly decimating them. Wildly they looked at the point whence it came, but vainly, for the morning mist had so thickened that they could but dimly see the outline of the rocks which overhung the back of the hollow. A great and thunderous roar, accompanying a hail of heavy slugs into the very thick of them, completed their discomfiture. With a wholesome recollection of the artillery practice some of them had witnessed on the banks of the Tsolo River not long before, they cried that the *Amapolise* were upon them, and disappeared helter-skelter into the mist and the bush at the lower side of the hollow.

Our two friends could hardly believe in their good fortune. Yet—no escape was to be theirs. A man was beside them—a black man—and in his hand a knife. They would be murdered, of course, in the hour of rescue. But—he was cutting their bonds.

"Quick! Come with me," he said in English, at the same time collecting the Police carbines and revolvers lying on the ground, which the panic-stricken Kafirs had omitted to carry away. Him they followed —Sandgate limping painfully—as he led the way to

the rocks above, where, ensconced in a cleft which commanded the hollow beneath, Harley Greenoak sat coolly refilling the magazine of a Winchester repeating rifle, while an old elephant gun of enormous calibre lay on the ground beside him.

"You're well out of that," he said, hardly looking up. "Lucky I got back to camp when I did, and John Voss came in at the same time with the notion he had picked up that Pahlandhle's crowd were particularly on the look-out for express-riders. I formed my plan there and then; borrowed Mainwaring's Winchester—dashed bad shooting-gun it is too—and, with John Voss's old elephant *roer* to give the idea of artillery, why—brought the whole thing off. Even then the mist counted for something."

In the last-named both now recognized one of the smartest native detectives attached to the F.A.M. Police.

"Come along," went on Greenoak, rising. "We must get on with those despatches. No time to lose."

"But—they are lost," said Sandgate, wearily.

"No, they ain't. John's got 'em."

The black man grinned as he handed the paper over to the corporal.

"But our horses?" said Dick Selmes, dismayed.

"Well, I got back one of them," answered Greenoak, equably. "One of you can ride John's—he's quite able to make his way back to the Kangala alone.

So there are mounts for the three of us, and the sooner we get on to the Isiwa fort the better.

"Well, Dick," he went on, "I take it you've found your first experience of express riding 'thunderingly exciting,' as you were saying the other day."

"I should think so—ugh!" And something like a shudder accompanied the words, as the speaker recalled their recent ghastly experience, and the lamentable fate of the unfortunate man whose body lay just beneath, and which they could not even spare the time to bury.

CHAPTER XIX

THE AMMUNITION ESCORT

"WHERE did you pick up that man, Jacob Snyman?" said Harley Greenoak.

"He's not been long attached to the Force," answered Sub-Inspector Ladell.

"Yes, I know, but *where* did you pick him up?"

"That's more than I can tell you. He's rather a pet of the Commandant's; helps him to find new sorts of butterflies and creeping things that the old man is dead nuts on collecting. So he took him on in the native detective line."

Harley Greenoak did not reply, but his thoughts took this very definite shape—

"That's all very well, but a taste for entomology on the part of an untrousered savage isn't going to get this escort safe and sound to the Kangala Camp. One more occasion for keeping one's eyes wide open."

The object of this inquiry was a thick-set, very black-hued Kafir, at the present moment not untrousered, for he wore the F.A.M. Police uniform of dark cord, and was driving one of the two ammunition

waggons, which, with their escort, were just getting out of sight of the solid earth bastion of Fort Isiwa. The said escort consisted of sixty men, under the command of a Sub-Inspector, beside whom Greenoak was riding. With him was Dick Selmes. The latter now struck in—

"What's the row with Jacob—eh, Greenoak?"

"I don't know that I said anything was."

"No. But you'd got on that suspicious look of yours when you spoke of him. I believe you're out of it this time. Now, I should say Jacob was as good a chap as ever lived, even though he is as black as the ace of spades. I've been yarning with him a heap."

"Have you? I think I'll follow your example then," returned Greenoak, reining in his horse so as to bring it abreast of the foremost of the ammunition waggons, ahead of which they had been riding.

The driver saluted. Though, as Dick Selmes had said, he was as black as the ace of spades, he had an extremely pleasant face and manner. Greenoak addressed him in the Xosa tongue, being tolerably sure that none of the Police troopers within earshot possessed anything but the merest smattering of that language, most of them not even that. Further, to make assurance doubly sure, he talked "dark." The while, Dick and Sub-Inspector Ladell also talked.

"Tell you what, Selmes," the latter was saying, "you're a regular Jonah. You're always getting yourself into some hobble, and Greenoak seems always to

be getting you out of it. Now, I'll trouble you to mind your P's and Q's while we're on this service, for we can spare neither time nor men till we're through with it. It's an important one, I can tell you, a dashed important one."

"Don't I know it?" answered Dick. "Didn't I take my full share of getting the despatches through? I couldn't help it if that poor unlucky idiot Stokes got drunk and killed."

"No, you certainly couldn't help that. But you're a Jonah, man. Yes, decidedly a Jonah."

"A Jonah be hanged!" laughed the other, lightly. "Well, Greenoak, what have you got out of Jacob Snyman?"

"Oh, nothing," was the casual reply. But though the speaker's face wore its usual mask-like imperturbability, the speaker's mind was revolving very grave thoughts indeed.

The escort, and its momentous charge, had effected a prompt and early start from Fort Isiwa, far earlier than could have been expected; for, thanks to Harley Greenoak's skilful guidance, the way across country of the express-riders had been nearly halved. The convoy, proceeding at something of a forced pace, had covered about three hours of ground since the said start.

The road lay over gently undulating ground, dotted with mimosa, now over a rise, only to dip down again

into a corresponding depression. Away, against the blue mountain range in the distance, arose here and there a column of thick white smoke in the still atmosphere. It wanted an hour to sundown. Then, suddenly, the lay of the land became steeper. Dark kloofs, thickly bushed, seemed to shoot forth like tongues, up to within a hundred yards of the high, switchback-like ridge which formed the line of march. But no Kafirs were met. It was as if the land were, in their own idiom for war, "dead." Even the few kraals which lay just off the road here and there, showed no sign of life.

By the advice of Harley Greenoak scouts had been thrown out ahead of the convoy. To this, Sub-Inspector Ladell, who, though as plucky as they make them, was not a particularly experienced officer, had at first demurred.

"Why, dash it all, there's no war," he had protested. "By putting on all this show we're making them think we're afraid of them."

"Well, take your own line. You're in command of this racket, not me," was the imperturbable rejoinder.

But the scouts *were* thrown out.

Now, as the convoy ascended a rise, two of these came galloping in. Several bodies of Kafirs, they reported, were massed in a shallow bushy kloof which ran up to the road ahead. They themselves had not been interfered with, but their appearance had been

marked by considerable excitement. Moreover, the savages were all armed, for they had seen the glint of assegais and gun-barrels.

"Hurrah!" sang out Dick Selmes. "Now we are going to have an almighty blue fight." But Ladell, alive to the gravity of his charge and his own responsibility, was not disposed to share his enthusiasm. Had he already got his convoy safe to the Kangala Camp, he would thoroughly have enjoyed the prospect of fighting all the ochre-smeared denizens of Kafirland—come one, come all. Now, the thing wore a different face.

"Well, we are going through," he said grimly. Then he gave orders that the escort should form up in close order round the two waggons, and thus they gained the top of the next rise.

"Down there, sir," said one of the men, who had brought in the news.

A bushy kloof fell away on their left front, its upper end nearly touching the road by about fifty yards. This was alive with wild forms, their red ochre showing in contrast to the dark green of the foliage. They made no pretence at concealment either; commenting in their own tongue with free outspokenness on the Police troopers, to whom they referred derisively as a lot of half-grown boys. However, this affected the latter not at all, for the simple reason that the contemptuous comments were not understood.

Sub-Inspector Ladell was in a quandary. That the savages meant mischief he was certain. Yet no war had—officially—broken out. If he ordered the first shot to be fired, why, he incurred a grave responsibility. On the other hand, the Kafirs were drawing nearer and nearer, crowding through the bushes like a swarm of red ants. Even as many another, when in a quandary, he referred to Harley Greenoak.

The latter nodded, and turning his horse, rode a little way out from the escort in the direction of the Kafirs, yet taking care to keep himself between them and the ammunition waggons. Then he lifted up his voice and hailed the enemy. From the latter a great shout went up.

"*Whau*—Kulondeka!"

Kulondeka—meaning "safe"—was, it will be remembered, the name by which Harley Greenoak was known among all the tribes by whom the Bantu dialects were spoken.

"You know me," he went on. "Good. Then come no nearer. The *Amapolise* have enough cartridges to keep on shooting you down like bucks for an entire day, or even more."

Even as he spoke the order had been given to load and dismount. Cartridges were slipped into the breeches of carbines, and those told off to hold the horses had got them in hand. The fighting-line stood, waiting the word to fire. Harley Greenoak had not

dismounted. Now he galloped quickly out of the firing-line, reining in ahead of the foremost of the ammunition waggons—that driven by Jacob Snyman.

With a sudden roar—deafening, terrific—the cloud of red savages came surging up the slope. They had flung off their blankets, and were whirling and brandishing these as they ran, with the double object of stampeding the horses, and disturbing their opponents' aim. Then, in a crackling volley, the Police carbines spoke. More than a dozen leaping sinuous forms came to earth, clutching wildly at nothing in their stricken throes. Others halted limpingly, or subsided. The charge was checked. Though in considerable force the assailants dropped into the long grass and behind mimosa bushes or ant-heaps, to gather, if might be, courage for another attempt.

"Great Scott, Ladell, but I bagged a right and left!" cried Dick Selmes, in tremendous excitement, banging a fresh pair of cartridges into his smoking gun.

"Get out with those old shooting yarns, Selmes," was the answer. "Why, the nearest was outside a hundred and fifty yards. You're not going to tell me your charge of buckshot'll kill at that distance. No. You'll have to stick to one."

"All right. Wait till they get nearer, and you'll see," retorted Dick.

As he spoke there was a wavy movement in the grass. Like lightning the Kafirs sprang up, bounding

forward again, and uttering deafening yells. They had discarded the blankets now, and came straight on, each grasping a short-handled, broad-bladed assegai. It was noteworthy that, although many had firearms, they forebore to use them. The bulk of the Police escort noticed this, but only one—and he not of the Police escort—understood it. That one was Harley Greenoak.

"Aim low, men, aim low," said Ladell, who, as we have said, though not a very experienced officer, was coolness and pluck itself.

The carbines barked, and again the assault was stayed. But now the firing and the yelling and the general racket had rendered the troop-horses restive, so that more men had to be told off to help hold them. This weakened the firing-line. And more and more Kafirs could be seen swarming up the kloof, in the rear of the original assailants.

The Police troopers were behaving admirably. Many, if not most of them, were quite youngsters, not long out from England, but the real fighting blood was there. True, they had not been literally under fire, but the spectacle of these swarming savages, and the reinforcements coming on behind, was nerve-trying enough. Why, their own small force was a mere mouthful to such as these! The sheer weight of numbers was enough to crush them; and added to this consciousness was the certainty that they were

opposed to an enemy who gave no quarter, except temporarily, that those thus spared might be put to death in lingering torment. Yet they were as cool as though at ordinary musketry practice.

"Here they come again!" sang out Ladell. "Aim low, boys, and steady. Give them three volleys, as quick as you can load."

The savages surged forward; near enough now to render distinguishable each broad, cruel face. Their sonorous war-shout had now become a strident hiss, in the hope of still further terrifying the frantic horses. A tongue of them darted round as though to outflank the position, and further confuse the mere handful of Police. The fire of the latter had now become a continuous roar.

But what of those who led the new manœuvre?

One by one down they went, each shot fair and square through the head, and that in regular and precise order. Half a dozen—eight—thus lay. In wild panic, which was half superstition, they halted, and pressed back. While thus bunched, a deadlier fire raked them. Utterly demoralized, they dropped into cover, and incontinently crawled out of the line of fire. Seeing which, Harley Greenoak said to himself complacently—

"This old repeating gas-pipe I borrowed from Mainwaring isn't such a bad practical joke after all."

Then he became alive to two facts; neither of

which astonished him, for he had foreseen both. One was that the enemy had had enough; the other that the team inspanned to the foremost of the ammunition waggons was in a state of wild panic—so much so indeed that its driver could no longer control it. And that driver was the very black, pleasant-mannered Kafir, Jacob Snyman.

The horses plunged and tugged wildly at the reins. So frantic were their plunges that it seemed a miracle that the whole thing was not overturned. Yet no upset took place.

No upset took place, but a bolt. The frantic animals dashed off—at headlong speed downhill—straight for where, amid the bush, the defeated Kafirs lay, broken up into sullen knots, but now, animated once more, eagerly awaiting this most welcome prize. Their driver seemed powerless to restrain the animals.

"Turn the horses, Manyelo! Turn the horses, or you have looked your last upon the sun!"

The driver, Jacob Snyman, knew the voice, even as it needed not his real name to bring home to him that he was known. Harley Greenoak, galloping abreast of the runaway team, but with his horse well in hand, was pointing a long-barrelled and very business-like revolver straight at his head, and he had only too recently seen what Harley Greenoak could do in the shooting line. So Jacob Snyman, *alias* Manyelo, deciding that however valuable some thousands of rounds of cartridge

might be to his expectant countrymen over yonder, life was a good deal more valuable to him—with sufficient show of pretence at succeeding—effectually turned his team, bringing it round to the escort again.

A volley of congratulations awaited.

"Well done, Jacob!" cried Sub-Inspector Ladell. "Why, man, we none of us expected to see you again with a whole skin, and so many more rounds of ammunition for John Kafir to blaze away at us with. Well done! By Jove, you stopped those fools of horses just in time!"

Jacob Snyman grinned softly, deprecatingly, and remarked that Ladell—and incidentally the Government—was his father. But Harley Greenoak said nothing.

The escort moved forward again, the savage enemy watching it from his far cover, and speculating on his chances of doing better next time. The Police were in high glee. They had beaten off a determined attack, with heavy odds against them, at considerable loss to the enemy—over forty dead had been hurriedly counted—and they themselves had come out without a scratch. To be sure, the said enemy had omitted to use any firearms, which omission they quite overlooked, or, if they gave it a thought, it was only as a subject for passing wonder. But Harley Greenoak did not so overlook it; for he knew the reason. The Kafirs wanted that ammunition, and so refrained from any

act which should result in blowing it all sky high. This was why he himself, except when in pursuit of the runaway team, had kept between the waggons and the enemy.

Night fell, the moon rose, and the convoy held on its way unmolested. The Police troopers were in high spirits after their first fight. Not less exultant was Dick Selmes; and during the short halt that was made, in order to rest the horses and snatch a hurried meal, he was fighting the battle over again with characteristic exuberance. All had shown what they could do.

Towards dawn another halt was called, and the tired troopers, flinging themselves on the ground, were fast asleep in a minute. But for their officer, tired as he was, there was no rest. His anxiety increased as they drew nearer to their objective; and, by way of adding to such anxiety, a heavy mist drew down. Sharing his vigil was Harley Greenoak.

The latter suddenly held up a hand for silence—the two men had been chatting in a low tone. Listening intently, the faintest sort of crackle, as of something burning, came to the quick ears of one of them. Now the striking of a light had been strictly prohibited.

Quick to act as to think, Harley Greenoak made straight for the ammunition waggons, which were drawn up side by side. As he gained them a figure

dashed out of one, nearly upsetting him, and disappeared into the mist; so quickly indeed as to render it useless to fire at it. But a more urgent duty lay to the hand of the investigator.

The latter, without hesitation, and in defiance of orders, struck a light, as he mounted the nearest of the waggons, and well, indeed, was it that he did so. One of the ammunition cases had been stealthily removed, and the cavity thus formed was filled with chips and dry grass, besprinkled with gunpowder, while leading up to this was a fuse, cunningly contrived of rope strands and tinder wood. A red glow, like that of a well-lighted cigar, was creeping along with alarming rapidity. In less than five minutes the whole escort would be blown to atoms. It took less than five seconds for Greenoak to remove and extinguish the deadly fuse, just as Ladell came up, and with much strong language wanted to know who was striking a light contrary to orders.

The while, the fugitive, who had disappeared into the mist, had the ill-fortune to stumble over Dick Selmes, fast asleep. The latter, however, lively through recent experiences, was promptly wide awake, and grabbed him by the leg, throwing him to the ground.

"Why, it's Jacob Snyman," he exclaimed, recognizing the other's voice, and releasing his hold. Hardly had he done so than Greenoak, hearing the

sound, came up. Too late. The fugitive had disappeared.

"Oh, I'll soon bring him back," cried Dick, after the first dozen words of explanation, and leaping to his feet, regardless of expostulation, and at imminent risk of being shot by the sentries, he plunged into the mist.

In hard training, he was able in a moment to hear the clink of stones as the fugitive ran. A spurt, and he came up with him. The Kafir seeing only one, and he almost certainly unarmed, drew a sheath knife, and stood waiting. And just then, as ill-luck would have it, his pursuer stumbled and fell headlong.

With an evil snarl the Kafir leapt forward. Where was the pleasant-faced, soft-mannered, civilized native now? A sheer savage this, about to shed blood, and that unnecessarily.

But out of the mist leapt two figures, and down went Snyman under the mighty fist of the Police corporal who was with Harley Greenoak. Disarmed, and rendered powerless for further mischief, he was brought back to the escort. When the nature of his misdoing got abroad, it was all Ladell could do to keep his men from lynching him. But now he was almost as anxious to get his prisoner safe to camp as he was the ammunition; and indeed he succeeded in doing both by the following midday.

"So Jacob's as good a chap as ever lived—eh, Dick?" said Harley Greenoak, drily, when that consummation had been attained.

"By Jingo! he'd have done for me if you fellows hadn't turned up," laughed Dick.

CHAPTER XX

THE TRAITOR

The Commandant was nothing if not thorough, and as it came home to him what a marvellous escape the ammunition escort had had, and the direful effects that would have resulted from the carrying out of the attempt—not only to the force under his command, but in consequence to many lives along the frontier—his first impulse was to order the traitor to be shot, right out of hand. Two considerations, however, moved him from his purpose, or at any rate to the postponement of it. One was that he was a man of judicial mind, and deemed it only fair that the culprit should have an opportunity of making what defence he could; the other a secret appreciation of the latter's calm courage. For Jacob Snyman had uttered no prayer for mercy, nor had he put on the swagger of bravado. To one of the Commandant's temperament this appealed powerfully. In fact, on thinking further, he was by no means eager to order the Kafir's execution, and probably he was the only man in the camp wearing the Police uniform of whom this could be said.

So Jacob Snyman—otherwise Manyelo—was brought before a sort of court-martial consisting of the Commandant and the commissioned officers, and was asked what he had to say.

He had nothing to say—what could he have? Then Harley Greenoak came forward, and told how he had found the fuse and the tinder in among the ammunition boxes, all ready fired. Told, too, how he had known the prisoner before and—well, had thought it right to keep an eye on his doings, and in the result had defeated his daring attempt to desert to the enemy with one of the ammunition waggons.

The Kafir smiled slightly at this, and shook his head.

"That would have been great," he muttered in his own tongue. "But who shall perform anything if Kulondeka is there, and is determined he shall not?"

When Dick Selmes was asked to give his version of the prisoner's attempt to murder him, he said at once that he'd rather not.

"Is it absolutely necessary, Commandant? It seems as if the wretched devil had got more on his back than he can throw off as it is," he pleaded. "I don't want to help drive nails into his coffin."

"Still, you'd better tell us what you know," was the uncompromising answer. And Dick did so.

The proceedings were as short as they were informal. No interpreting was necessary, as the prisoner spoke English glibly and well. He was asked once more if he had anything to say.

Well, he had, was the answer, but he supposed it did not amount to much. He had joined the Police only with an eye to helping his countrymen, and, why should he not? Would an Englishman not undergo risk for the sake of helping his countrymen? Well then, if this was right in an Englishman, why was it wrong in a Kafir? What Kulondeka had stated was quite correct. He had volunteered to drive the foremost ammunition waggon, with the object of preventing it—and, as he had hoped, the other also—from reaching the Kangala Camp at all; and, had he succeeded, he would have placed a large store of ammunition in the hands of his countrymen. The reason why the latter had used no firearms in yesterday's fight, he said, was for fear of exploding this ammunition.

Those who heard were listening with extraordinary attention. There was something strangely pathetic in this smiling, unperturbed man telling his story without hope or fear on the one hand, and without bravado or defiance on the other. He was, in fact—and he knew it himself—to use Dick Selmes' syllogism, driving the nails into his own coffin. He richly deserved his fate of course, but——

When that plan failed, went on Jacob, he had tried to blow up the waggon. No. He had not blown up the one which had been exploded before, though it was true that this event had put the idea into his head. Had he succeeded, the whole of the Police force at the Kangala would have been annihilated.

"That all?" said the Commandant, tersely.

The prisoner nodded.

"That all," he assented, as though he had been narrating the misdeeds of somebody else, in which he had no concern whatever.

"Remove him fifty paces back," said the Commandant.

Then the little group conferred. Harley Greenoak stood by listening to their counsels, but taking no part therein. There was a solemnity in the demeanour of the younger officers. Even Ladell, who would willingly have shot the delinquent with his own hand when caught in the act, inwardly shrank from helping to doom a man to death in cold blood, even though the man was black and richly deserved his fate. However, the safety of more than themselves called for stern necessities. The deliberation was a short one.

"Jacob," said the Commandant, when the prisoner had been brought back. "On your own showing you have played the part of a spy, a traitor, and a

would-be murderer. In half an hour you will be taken outside the camp and shot."

"In half an hour?"

"In half an hour," repeated the Commandant, clicking open his watch.

"*Hau!* May I smoke pipe o' 'bacco first?"

"Here!" cried Dick Selmes, springing eagerly forward and wrenching open his pouch.

The Kafir calmly proceeded to fill his pipe. Then he asked for a light. No objection was raised.

"I t'ank you, sir," he said courteously, returning the pouch, and proceeding to emit complacent puffs. There was a silence. Probably the most at his ease was the culprit, whose life had but minutes to run. The Commandant, at any time a man of few words, sat back in his camp chair, his face as impassive as wood, his gaze straight in front of him. It was a silence nobody cared to break. To Dick Selmes it was especially awesome, even terrible. He would have liked to plead for the man's life, but he knew it would be useless. There were but eight minutes more.

The doomed one, where he was squatting, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, then half filled it again, with a little tobacco he had kept over, in the hollow of his hand. A few more puffs. There were but five minutes to run. The sun flamed in an unclouded sky, the green roll of hill and plain golden beneath his beam, and for this man, who sat there, in five minutes

should be substituted the Dark Unknown. Yet he sat, placidly puffing out tobacco smoke as if he had a hundred years to live. A savage and a heathen, death seemed to hold out for him no terrors whatever.

The Commandant shut up his watch. The prisoner rose, calling out that he would like to take his farewell of a very Great One, one who was a great fighting chief and a great *igqira* * as well; for whom he had found many magical things—this in reference to the Commandant's love of collecting to which we have already heard reference made by Sub-Inspector Ladell. Further, he desired to bequeath to that Great One something valuable, a "word" of great weight, such as might be the saving of many lives. He did not ask his own as the price. He merely wanted to leave a bequest to his father and chief, the Commandant.

Thus, as the latter, having signed that he should be brought forward, the doomed one stood before his judges.

"What is that 'word'?" said the Commandant, shortly.

"This, *amakosi*. The whole of the Gudhluka Reserve is up in arms, and the Kangala will be heavily attacked this very night."

"And the chiefs—who are they?"

"Vunisa and Pahlandhle. They have been massing their men for days. Now they are ready."

* Doctor.

"And how have you known this, here, under arrest?"

The Kafir smiled and shook his head.

"I was not a prisoner the day before yesterday, Great One," he answered.

"If you ran such risks for the benefit of your countrymen yesterday, how is it you will give them into our hands to-day?" asked the Commandant.

"You are my 'father,' Great One, whom I have lived to serve. I go to my death, but I do not want you to meet yours. To the whole of the Gudhluka Reserve the *Amapolise* here are as a mouthful, if taken unprepared—*if taken unprepared*," he repeated.

Among the young officers there was a stir of sensation. The whole story, in their opinion, was an impudent cook-up. The fellow had invented it to save his life. Surely the Chief would not be humbugged by any such yarn as that. But then they remembered that its inventor had not even asked for his life. In their whispered remarks Inspector Chambers and the two other Inspectors took no part. They had unbounded confidence in the judgment of their Chief.

The latter sat, stroking his long beard as he gazed thoughtfully at the prisoner. A lifelong experience had taught him that no white man ever got thoroughly to the bottom of the innermost workings of a Kafir's mind. He might think he did, only to find that it was just the moment when he did not. He himself

was partial to the natives, and no man was more appreciative of the good points in the native character. He knew, too, that a native is very much a creature of irresponsible impulse. This boy, who would cheerfully have sacrificed them all yesterday, felt now concerned at the possible risk to his Chief. He had accompanied the latter on many a collecting expedition in pursuit of his natural history studies, and had entered into these with enthusiasm and zest; here, then, was a motive, here a presumption that his weighty warning might be a true one. None knew better than himself either, the marvellous, if mysterious, methods which these people had of flashing news from point to point almost with telegraphic swiftness, wherefore he had no reason to doubt that this one knew what he was talking about.

"Attend now, Jacob," he said. "You made a grave attempt yesterday against the safety of all here, and it did not succeed. To-day you are, as you say, making an attempt to ensure our safety. If that succeeds it will wash out the other attempt." Then to those who custodied him, "Take him to the guard hut, iron his legs at any rate, and put two sentries on guard—until further orders."

Jacob Snyman, otherwise Manyelo, saluted and was led away. He knew now that his life was saved.

Dick Selmes and one or two more noticed an almost imperceptible but approving nod on the part

of Harley Greenoak, standing behind the Commandant, as this decision was given. The latter rose. The proceedings were ended. It was near evening now, and the whole Force was immediately put in preparation for giving its expected assailants a particularly warm reception.

"Well, you're a plucky young swine anyhow, Jacob," growled one of the troopers who was fixing on the leg irons. "Darned if I didn't think we should be shovelling you underground just now, instead of anchoring you tight in a snug hut. But if you don't get us our big fight to-night, the old man'll still have you shot."

"Oh, you get your fight right enough," answered the prisoner, with a careless laugh. "Quite as much fight as you want, no fear. I say—any one got pipe o' 'bacco to spare?"

"Here you are, you young swab, although you did try to blow us all sky high," said the man, lugging out half a handful. "Still you're plucky enough anyway."

CHAPTER XXI

THE ATTACK

THE camp of the Frontier Armed and Mounted Police at the Kangala lay wrapped in the stillness of profound slumber.

It was the darkest hour of night—that before the dawn. Even that would not have been dark, for the moon had not yet set, but a thick mist lay upon the land, blotting out everything in its confusing, bewildering folds; damp too, so that the shivering men, sleeping on their arms, disposed at their posts instead of within the comparative snugness of their kennel-like patrol tents, needed but little rousing in the event of the expected happening. But strict orders for silence had been issued, also that no light was to be struck on any pretext whatever; wherefore these shivering ones were perforce denied the solace of the warm and comforting pipe. The troop-horses on the picket lines were beginning to bestir themselves, as an occasional snort and stamp would testify.

The Commandant came out of one of the huts which had been erected for the use of the officers;

he had not slept in it, any more than that night had any man under his command, officer or private trooper. He glanced upward, as the lightening of the mist showed a pale, wrack-swept moon, then held up against the latter something that looked uncommonly like an ordinary large-sized pickle-bottle. No newly invented projectile was this, however, it being in fact just what it looked, and it contained something nondescript of the lizard tribe, reposing motionless on the harmless-looking chemical which constituted the jar a miniature lethal chamber. For the cool, self-possessed officer in command of the frontier force was known to science as an enthusiastic naturalist, as we have already pointed out.

He did not start in the least at the sound of an almost imperceptible tread behind him.

"That you, Greenoak'?" was all he said, without taking his attention off the jar. "My specimen's dead by now. I think, though, I'll put him inside the hut in case of accidents." Then, reappearing, "Well? I suppose we shall be hard at it in an hour?"

"Less than that," replied Harley Greenoak. "Listen!"

Out in the mist the shrill, long-drawn, laughing bay of a jackal rang out, then again. It was answered by another, on the opposite side of the camp, and about at the same distance from it.

"That doesn't seem to ring quite true, does it?" said Greenoak.

"No, it doesn't. And there's a mathematical precision about it unusual among the beasts of the field," was the answer.

Greenoak nodded.

"Right you are, Commandant," he said. "Listen. The mathematical calculation keeps up."

For, on the other front came the same sound at exactly the same distance in that direction. It was answered by the two who had first given tongue, but now all these three voices seemed to be receding. This ordinary nocturnal sound would have attracted the attention—we dare say—of no other there present, but to the keen experienced ears of the Commandant and the up-country hunter the note, as the latter had said, did not ring true.

The camp was situated upon an open plateau, with a sparse mimosa growth beginning about a hundred yards from the defences, and stretching away to much thicker bush half a mile further on the south front and the two corresponding sides. Here the ground sloped away to a low range of hills, distant enough, however, not to command the position. On the north, or rear, the ground was almost entirely open. A low sod wall and a shallow trench surrounded the camp on all sides, and had been constructed in a square formation. The ammunition supply, now abundant, thanks to Harley

Greenoak and the bravery of the express-riders, was securely disposed, and, at the same time, readily get-at-able. Only one of the two seven-pounders constituting the Police artillery battery was present—the other being away on service elsewhere—and this was trained so as to protect the south front.

In obedience to orders, quickly and noiselessly issued, every man was now at his post. The excitement was tense, painful. Most of those present had never been in action, a proportion had never even witnessed the taking of human life in any form. But they were well officered, and by none better than by their Commandant. He, utterly calm and self-contained, his helmet towering nearly a head above the group of officers surrounding him, stood, stroking his long beard; and, as he uttered a dry witticism or two in an undertone in response to their remarks, his thoughts running about equally on the work in front, and the latest "specimen" he had captured, was as a very pillar of strength to some of the untried younger men there present.

"By George, the Chief's splendid!" exclaimed Dick Selmes, who, in his eagerness, was right in among the front rank of the fighters.

"Silence there!" came the whispered but sharp mandate of a sergeant. "Oh, it's Mr. Selmes? Well, if you're not in the ranks you are for the present," he added meaningly.

Dick apologized and shut up. He was in such a state of suppressed excitement that it was all he could do to keep silence.

Now the dawn was lightening, and with it the mist. Harley Greenoak whispered a word or two to the Commandant. Both stood listening intently, and, in a moment, the officer in charge of the seven-pounder moved swiftly from the group. A red flash belched forth dully through the mist, together with a resonant roar, and with the bursting of the shrapnel, some six hundred yards away on the front face of the position, came sharp, startled yells of dismay and of agony. Harley Greenoak's fine, well-nigh supernatural sense of hearing had told him that at this front were massed a considerable body of the savage enemy.

Grimly, justifiably elate, the gunners in a trice had rammed home the next charge. And then with the widening dawn, the mist rolled back like a curtain, and this is what it revealed.

The thicker bush line, barely half a mile distant, was pouring forth dense masses of Kafirs. They seemed to swarm like disturbed red ants; and now, with a tremendous and vibrating roar, the whole of this formidable array swept forward upon the Police camp.

"Seems to me we're taking on all the Kafirs in Africa," said Inspector Chambers, lowering his glass. "Thousands and thousands anyhow."

The Commandant issued some orders, characteristically laconic and few. He and Harley Greenoak were the only two men present who betrayed absolutely no sign of any excitement.

The swarming assailants had halved the distance now, and their front ranks, dropping into cover, began opening a furious fire upon the camp. Two troopers were hit, but not fatally. Then the seven-pounder spoke again, and with the reverberating boom the bursting shrapnel fell beautifully over a point where the savages were massed thickest. But, so far from dismaying them, it had the effect of urging them on to the attack, so as to get it over as quickly as possible, which was just what the Commandant intended should happen.

Those in the enemy's firing-line leaped up and charged forward in skirmishing order, dropping into cover every now and then to deliver a rapid volley. So far, from the Police camp not a rifle-shot had been fired. Only the seven-pounder boomed as quickly as it could be loaded, every time dropping its shrapnel where likely to prove most effective.

In crescent formation the front line of the savages had now reached within three hundred yards of the camp. They had ceased all shouting, and were coming on in silence; grim, naked figures, save for their fantastic war-adornments. Then the Police carbines

barked. The men had been especially enjoined to fire low, and in the result, at such close range, the blow to the onrushing enemy was felt, and as the first discharge was quickly followed by another and another, his ranks staggered, swayed this way and that, then dropped down into cover again.

This was the opportunity of the assailed and, incidentally, of Harley Greenoak. For cover was very scant so near the camp, and when two men got behind a stone or ant-heap that would not have sheltered one, why, the bullets had a pitiless knack of finding them out. Utterly demoralized, the skirmishers crawled away to a remoter point where the bush grew thicker, and for upwards of an hour kept up a straggling fire. But they never repeated their first rush. The back of the fight seemed to have been broken by the terrible execution done during that same rush. At last, utterly panic-stricken, they fled.

Now A. Troop was ordered to complete the blow by a pursuit; under so experienced an officer as Inspector Chambers there was no chance of it being drawn too far. And we may be sure that Dick Selmes did not remain behind.

For the first time now he realized the sights and horrors of a battlefield. Wherever he looked it was to behold some stark and gory corpse, even piles of them where the deadly shrapnel had done its work.

Wounded Kafirs too, groaning and twisting in their pain—ugh! It was horrible! But, as the Police came up with the rear masses of the flying enemy, the fierce excitement revived. The horrors were forgotten.

CHAPTER XXII

THE TWO CHIEFS

"HALLO! Here's a chap we've overlooked," sang out Dick, turning his horse. Four troopers followed him. A little to the right of the pursuit a solitary Kafir was standing, peering over a bush. As the five charged up to him, revolver in hand, he sank to the ground.

"No kill. I hit," he said, in English. "Hit bad —in the leg."

There was no mistake about that. From a neat bullet-hole in the calf, blood was oozing. However, dismounting, the men kicked his assegai out of his reach.

"No kill," repeated the fellow, spreading out his hands. "I tell you something—something you like hear."

Dick Selmes, who, of course, had not the remotest intention of killing a wounded man, here assumed an aspect of the most merciless ferocity. He pointed his revolver at the Kafir's head.

"Tell away," he said. "If it's not worth hearing, I'll scatter your brains, by Cæsar's ghost I will!"

"It worth hearing," answered the other. "How you like take chief, eh?"

"Chief? Which chief?"

"Vunisa. Pahlandhle. Two chief."

"Go on. Only remember if you humbug us, then, —good night." And Dick touched the helpless man's head with the muzzle of his pistol, as an earnest of what was to come.

"You go on up dere," went on the Kafir. "Two tree—Kafir-boen—over rock. Rock hang over hole—same as place where we take you. Vunisa—Pahlandhle —they hide there—wait till *Amapolise* done killing Kafir—then they get away. You take them same as we take you—easily."

Now Dick Selmes remembered. The voice, the face, came back to him. Why, this was the English-speaking Kafir who had ordered them to read the despatches, and had directed the torture of Sandgate because they refused. Had the fellow been armed, and fighting, he would have shot him with infinite satisfaction, as the recollection of that ghastly experience came back. But it was manifestly out of the question to shoot an unarmed and helpless man; besides, this one was giving him information which set all his blood tingling with the prospect of a glorious adventure—if it were true. If so, and it were carried out successfully, such a feat was bound to procure sure and rapid promotion to the four young Police troopers with him.

"I know the spot he means, Selmes," said one of these, a Colonial-born man, who understood veldt-craft and spoke the Xosa language fluently. "And I think he's very likely telling the truth."

"Oh, I tell truth," said the wounded man. "Dey not my chiefs—and Pahlandhle eat up my cattle. I like to see him shot."

"If you've told us a lie, that's what you'll be," said Dick, "you may take your oath upon that. We'll come back for you, never fear."

"Oh, I not fear," said the other, easily. "If you grab chiefs, I like to join Police as 'tective. How that?"

"That's for the Commandant. But I expect he'll take you on," answered Dick, airily. "Come along, you chaps. We'll bag these two, or not go back at all."

"Rather," was the unanimous answer. As we have said, Dick Selmes was exceedingly popular in the Force since he had been its guest. He put on no "side" whatever, and had shown rare pluck whenever opportunity for such had occurred. These four would have followed him anywhere; the more mad and dare-devil the adventure the better.

"Now, Sketchley, you must be guide," he said to the Colonial man. "If this fellow's lying, of course we'll come back and shoot him. Here—what's your name?"

"Tolangubo. English—where I work before—call me John Seapoint."

The mist, which had lightened on the plain, still hung heavy on the higher ridges. This was all in their favour.

Under the guidance of Sketchley, the Colonial-born trooper, they were not long in reaching their objective.

"We'll leave the horses here," said this man. "Now—silence is the word, I need hardly say. You, Simpson, you're a clumsy beast, you know, but for Heaven's sake don't kick so much as a little stone this time."

The reply was a growling promise to punch the speaker's head when all was over, and they started their stealthy climb. Not long did it take, and then, at a word from Sketchley, all halted for a hurried breather.

Above was the lip of the hollow the Kafir had described. There were the two trees overhanging—all corresponded exactly. But what if the said hollow were bristling with armed savages? What if they had walked into a palpable trap—was the thought that occurred to them now. Tolangubo had not said that the two chiefs were alone, they now remembered; immediately consoling themselves with the thought that it would not have made much difference if he had.

With beating hearts the five peered over the ridge. There, not a hundred yards distant, squatted four Kafirs. Four. Which of the two were the chiefs?

"That's Vunisa," whispered Dick Selmes, excitedly. "I'd swear to him anywhere."

But the whisper, faint though it was, reached the ears of the keen-witted savages. These sat bolt upright, listening. All four, with a subtle movement, reached for their arms; two for their rifles, the others for their assegais.

"That settles it," breathed the Colonial man. "The ones with the guns are the chiefs. Now, we mustn't give away the smallness of our force. Let 'em think there's a crowd behind. Come on, now."

The five advanced, covering the group with their revolvers.

"Yield, chiefs!" cried Sketchley, in the Xosa tongue. "If a man moves he is shot."

A man did move, making a sudden spring to get away. Him Sketchley promptly and unerringly shot dead. This told. The remaining three stood, sullenly awaiting events.

"Drop your weapons, or you are all shot," he went on.

The Kafirs stared, and, believing him, sulkily obeyed.

"Don't quit covering them for a moment," cried Dick Selmes. "I'll go in, and tie them up."

They had brought reims from their horses' headstalls. With these Dick now approached. There was no mistaking the chiefs. Vunisa and Pahlandhle were both elderly men of powerful build, the other was a mere boy. Both seemed to treat the affair as entirely beneath their notice, and, making a virtue of necessity, submitted to have their arms bound behind them, in sullen silence, the while the Police troopers were covering them effectually and at close quarters with their revolvers. But hardly had this operation been completed than the other, whom they had left to the last, with a spring and a rush disappeared into the mist, leaping and zigzagging to dodge the bullets which were fired after him.

"Here's a howling joke," said Trooper Sketchley. "He isn't touched, and now he's gone to raise a rescue. Those chaps'll rally like the deuce to get back their chiefs."

"Will they?" said Dick Selmes, smart, alert, with the tingling sense of adventure. "Come along then. We'll wheel them back to camp before there's time for any bother of that sort. The old Commandant'll look mighty surprised, I'll bet."

So these five hair-brained youngsters started off; shoving their august prisoners along at a pace which sorely tried the dignity of the latter. When they gained the lip of the hollow, Sketchley gave a signal to halt.

The mist was all driving back, leaving one side of the hill bare. But this was by no means as it had been when they came up it. The stones and bushes, glistening with dew, were now alive with red-ochred forms, swift-moving, lithe, stealing upward; assegais and guns held ready in sinewy, eager grip. Then, as the helmets of two careless troopers showed above the ridge, there was a sudden roaring discharge of firearms, and the vicious "whigge" overhead showed that the "pot legs" and bullets were beginning to fly.

Now these five were in a tight hole. The Kafirs, rallying to the rescue of their chiefs, were coming on to storm that hill with a fixity of purpose which left nothing to be desired or to be hoped for. They reckoned on finding at least fifty men up there, and these were only five.

"A few more steps, and both chiefs will be shot," sang out Sketchley, in their own language.

But it seemed to stay the rush not at all. Swarming through the bushes, they still kept on. In a minute or two they would rush the position.

"Give them a volley!" yelled Dick Selmes.

This was done, but with scant effect.

Slapping in their reloads, the men delivered another, this time with considerable effect, for it checked the advance. But the worst of it was that, further out, they could see more and more Kafirs coming up to the support of these. Then a shout went up.

"Release the two chiefs, white men, and we will leave you."

They looked at each other. What chance had they of holding their own against such odds—but on the other hand, could they trust the promises of the savages? This, in substance, Sketchley called out in reply.

"*Au!*" exclaimed Pahlandhle, with some eagerness. "We you can trust. You are only a few foolish boys. Let us go, and then you may go home yourselves. None of these will harm you."

"None," echoed Vunisa, emphatically.

"Well, and what do you all say?" asked Sketchley, having translated this.

"I've got people at home," said one of the troopers, meaningly.

"So have I," declared another.

"Let's put it to the vote then," went on Sketchley. "It's on the cards they'll keep their word, and then we've had all this bother for nothing. Otherwise, candidly, I don't believe we've the ghost of a chance. Now then?"

The two who had first spoken were for surrendering the chiefs. Sketchley and the other trooper were against it.

"Now then, Selmes," said the latter. "You've got the casting vote."

Dick was inclined to hold out, but what right had

he to sacrifice these men's lives? Besides, had not he also "got people at home"? He wavered. Then something occurred which decided him, decided them all. For just then the mist parted all round. A strong body of Police, attracted by the firing, was swarming up the hill.

The answer of the besieged was another volley, this time with effect. All four shots told—one man had been left in charge of the captive chiefs, with revolver ready to shoot both dead in the event of their countrymen gaining a foothold on the ridge. Then another volley with like effect. These young Englishmen, you see, were now in the most dangerous position of all to their enemies—that of "cornered"—and they shot deadly, and cool. The original assailants, who, heartened by their reinforcements, had sprung up to renew the attack, now began to drop behind cover again.

"Give 'em another!" yelled Dick.

"No. Wait till they show," corrected Sketchley. "No good lessening the wholesome scare they've got of us by blazing at stones."

Even as he spoke the savages became alive to this new turn of events, and reckoning they would soon be caught between two fires, were, with warning cries to each other, beginning to glide away. But between the two fires a good few were consumed before they managed to; for the shots from above were now coolly and carefully timed, and those from below, especially

where Harley Greenoak got his foresight on to a brown red body, told with terror-striking effect. In a very few minutes there was not a Kafir left on the hillside.

"Hi! Here! Hullo, Greenoak, here we are," sung out Dick Selmes. "You're just in time, but we've bagged the two chiefs. Come along."

They started back to camp without delay. Just before reaching it, one of the four troopers, who was given to pessimism, remarked—

"Old Chambers'll get all the kudos for to-day's job. We shan't."

It may be said that in the event the speaker was wrong. The Commandant was far too wise and too just a man to allow a meritorious service to go unrecognized. In the event, too, it transpired that these four had performed a very meritorious service indeed, and all of them, except one man who left the Force, his time having expired, got promotion as soon as practicable.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE COMMANDANT'S JOKE

"HALLO, Selmes, what's the row with you?" said Trooper Sketchley, suddenly noticing that Dick's face had gone rather white. "Confound it, you didn't get hit, did you?"

Harley Greenoak, who was riding a little way in front, keeping a watchful eye on the captive chiefs, instinctively reined in his horse, having just overheard. The movement annoyed Dick Selmes. It seemed to him to savour of leading-strings; and had not he borne part in two good fights—three, in fact, for this capture of the two chiefs was better than a fight. It was a bold dash and a fight combined.

"Oh, it's nothing," he answered, rather testily. "Something seemed to knock me during that last volley. I expect it was a spent pot-leg or splinter of rock. But it'll keep till we get back to camp."

"Where did it knock you?" said Greenoak.

"Here. Bridle arm. Rather ride with the right."

"All serene. But—just haul up your sleeve, if you can."

No fuss. No calling a halt. Just a plain injunction. Such was Harley Greenoak. Dick obeyed.

"You'll be all right, Dick," pronounced Greenoak, after a brief scrutiny, during which he strove to conceal the anxiety he felt. "It's as you say, a spent pot-leg. But it has made a nasty jagged scratch all the same, and we'll get the sawbones at it soon as we're in. You may thank your stars it was a spent one, or you'd have had a broken arm for some time to come."

"Never mind. We've boned the chiefs," said Dick, delightedly. "That sweep Vunisa, he's the beggar who'd have cut my throat that night they tied me up in a bag. Jolly glad we've boned him. Bit of turning the tables there."

"We ought to enlist you, Selmes," said Sub-Inspector Mainwaring, who was in command of the body that had so opportunely come to the rescue. "You're a tiger for pulling off anything out of the way."

"Well, I hope I'll go through some more jolly old scraps with you fellows," answered Dick. "The war seems to have begun in earnest now."

"Don't know. This may have broken the whole back of it. Eh, Greenoak?"

"May, or may not," answered the latter, who was not going to commit himself to an ordinary conversational opinion at that stage.

They were joined by the other half of the pursuit under Inspector Chambers. One man had been killed. A desperate savage, fairly cornered, had sprung like a wild cat upon the unfortunate trooper and assegaied him fair and square as he sat in his saddle, being himself, however, immediately shot. Three more were wounded with assegai cuts. But, all things considered, the Police had come off with flying colours, and all hands were in high spirits.

On the way, they picked up the wounded Kafir, Tolangubo, who had given the information which had led to the capture of the chiefs. He had proved useful enough already, and might prove so again, thought Inspector Chambers when the man expressed a desire to join the Police as a native detective. But, watching his opportunity, he besought Harley Greenoak to enjoin upon the four troopers on no account to let out that he had been instrumental in that, for in such event he could be of no use at all, as the vengeance of his countrymen would be certain to overtake him, and then—why, a dead man was more useless than a dead ox, since you could neither eat him nor use his skin—he added, somewhat humorously.

On reaching camp the two chiefs were lodged in the guard-hut, Jacob Snyman having been now released and allowed to return to duty. He had shown his good faith. The attack against which he had warned them had been made in real earnest, and now in the

flush of victory, the would-have-been traitor found himself rather popular than otherwise. All the same, a watchful eye was kept upon him. Vunisa and Pahlandhle accepted the position with sullen philosophy. They were told that they would be kept as hostages for the good behaviour of their people—an announcement which filled them with no exhilaration, remembering as they did, though keeping the knowledge to themselves, that the Gudhluka Reserve was a very Alsatia, and comprised plenty of turbulent spirits, whose allegiance to themselves was purely nominal. But there they were, and their rations were regular, and the Police were not stingy with tobacco; so the philosophy of the savage stood them in good stead: "Sufficient unto the day."

"Well, Greenoak. It seems to me we are making a real frontiersman of our friend here," said the Commandant, going on the while sorting out and otherwise arranging his "specimens," as calmly as though they had not spent the morning in defeating and thoroughly routing a few thousand of bloodthirsty savages. "Wounded too? Never mind, Selmes. Think what a lot of yarns you'll have to spin to the people at home."

"Oh, I don't mind that, Commandant. But—er—Blunt says it's a toss up whether I'll be able to take a hand in any more fights for a month or so. And by that time the war may be over."

"Hope so, I'm sure," was the dry reply. "Eh, Greenoak?"

The latter nodded.

For the Police surgeon—Dr. Blunt—a tall, pleasant-mannered Irishman—had examined and duly dressed Dick's wound, informing him that, although not serious, it was not a thing to play the fool with.

"You see, Selmes," he said, "you are such a rash, impetuous beggar. I suppose if some nigger were to sneak in to-night and tell you he knew where to capture old Kreli, you'd start out on the spot and try and do it. Well, let me remind you there's such a thing as blood-poisoning. It's all right now, but if you get acting the ass with this thing, open and running as it'll be for the next few days, why, there's no telling. No, my boy. You'll have to wear your arm in a sling till I tell you to take it out. What then? Why, you'll only look the more interesting. Anyway, it's only your left fin."

This was some consolation. For it enabled Dick to sit down and write a full, true, and particular account of the two battles and their sequel to Hazel Brandon, and, incidentally, to his father, to be sent when the Commandant should elect to send through despatches reporting recent affairs.

"What do you make of this beast, Greenoak?" went on the Commandant, as he extracted the last captured lizard specimen from the lethal pickle-bottle.

"Don't know. I'm not up in scientific natural history."

"Well, he's quite an uncommon variety. Shall have to look him up when I get back to my library."

Greenoak exchanged a comical look with Dick Selmes. The Commandant, for the moment, attached more importance to the capture of this miserable, uninviting little specimen of the lizard tribe, than he did to the stirring and momentous events of the last couple of days. And yet—were the alarm again to be given, no man in that camp would be more readily on the spot, the very personification of cool and calm collectedness.

There were other humours in the life of the camp which every now and then would come to the fore. One day a trooper, charged with trying to shoot himself with his carbine, was marched before the Commandant. The latter looked at him in a half-abstracted, lack-lustre sort of way, then ordered him extra musketry practice—"for," he added, with characteristic dryness, "a man who can't hit himself at no yards isn't likely to be able to hit an enemy at so many."

Theli Corporal Sandgate returned to the Kangala and reported for duty. His foot was quite healed now, and all he asked for were a few chances of being even with the brutes who had tortured him.

"Well, the prime mover in it is here in the camp

now, old chap," said Dick Selmes. "But you won't be able so much as to punch his head, for he's shot through the leg. Besides, I believe the old man's contemplating taking him on as a native 'tec." And he told the other how the Kafir had put them in the way of capturing the two chiefs.

"Well, you've been in luck's way, Selmes," said Sandgate, wistfully, "although you've got winged yourself. You've come in for a lot of hard, lively service, while I've been kicking up my heels rotting in hospital at Isiwa. Some fellows have all the luck. Mine, of course, is to be reduced, if not hoofed out of the Force."

"Bosh! Not a bit of it. Buck up, old chap! You're far too useful to the Force for that. Why, man, you did a splendid service. If I had been in your place I expect I'd have given away the whole show."

But Sandgate refused to be comforted. He had been found wanting when engaged upon service of vital importance. There was no getting behind that.

A few days later he was sent for by the Commandant. It happened that he and Dick were chatting together at the time.

"All up," he said resignedly. "Told you so."

The Commandant was seated in front of his hut. An express had just ridden in, and, together with

Inspector Chambers, he was going through the correspondence. He looked up.

"Corporal Sandgate, yes," he said, as the other saluted in silence. "Well, I can hardly call you that now. You are relieved of your rank."

"Yes, sir. I expected no less," answered the poor fellow, saluting again, and making as if to withdraw.

"One moment. Read that," said the Commandant, handing him a folded letter in blue official foolscap.

Sandgate, again saluting, took it mechanically. As he glanced down the sheet, he gave a start, and his handsome sun-browned face lost all its colour, then flushed, as he mastered, in cold official phraseology, that on account of his heroic endurance, which had resulted in the saving of vitally important despatches entrusted to his care, from falling into the hands of the enemy, and by reason of his general efficiency and zealous service, he was appointed to the rank of Sub-Inspector in the room of the late Sub-Inspector Francis Madden of D. Troop, killed in action at the Qora River.

Sandgate entertained no clear idea of what happened when he had grasped the purport of this announcement, only a confused recollection of not being quite responsible for his actions. In point of fact he sprang forward impulsively, and, seizing the Commandant by the hand, shook it again and again without ceremony.

"Oh, sir! This is all your doing," he cried. "And I—can't say anything."

"Then don't try," was the answer. And a kindly smile lurked in the ordinarily imperturbable face. The joke was one which appealed to its owner.

Just after this, troop after troop of armed and mounted levies came pouring into the Transkei. Every part of the Colony had responded to the call, and the Gcaleka country was swept from end to end, its defeated inhabitants retreating sullenly across the Bashi, there to billet themselves, more or less by force, upon the weaker tribes which occupied the country further to the eastward. But these reinforcements, relieving the Police, enabled the latter to withdraw to the frontier, where it might be that in the near course of events their services would be even more urgently needed.

And Sub-Inspector Sandgate went to join his new troop, in a state of mind representing that there was hardly anything left in life to wish for.

CHAPTER XXIV

ANOTHER JOKE

THE village of Komgha was going through lively times. Every day nearly, levies, on their way to the front, would be passing through, and as it was the last settlement on the border, rations and other necessaries would be in demand, which was good for trade. Moreover, every room and corner in the place was occupied, not to mention waggons and tents on the common land; for something of a scare was prevalent. The Gcalekas beyond the border had been defeated, certainly —or rather had been chased out of their own country —but there was restlessness among the Gaika and Ndhlambe tribes within the border, and these were both numerous and powerful, with a fine war-like reputation in the past. So many homesteads had been abandoned temporarily, and their owners had either gone into laager, or into the settlement, or, at any rate, had sent their wives and families thither. A goodly proportion, on the other hand, ridiculed the scare, and remained on their farms.

And they seemed justified in doing so. Already

more than one of the burgher forces had withdrawn from the Transkei *en route* for home. The country was quiet again, it was reported; luckily the disturbance had been kept beyond the border, or the inter-Colonial tribes would have been up in a blaze. But there were always some uncomfortable objectors who liked to point out that the Paramount Chief had not been captured, that the rising was only scotched, not killed, and that then we should see.

The village was the virtual headquarters of the F.A.M. Police—and in the Artillery barracks crowning an eminence, no less than in the two troops occupying a permanent camp just outside, a chronic state of readiness and activity prevailed. A scheme of defence too had been formed in case of attack—an event of the highest improbability, for even if the rising were to spread, the Kafirs would refrain from attacking a strongly defended place, and reserve their energies for the destruction of outlying farms and the ambush and massacre of small bodies of travelling whites.

Dick Selmes was growing rather impatient. If he could bear no further part in the war—and the doctor had again seriously warned him not to take his wound too lightly—he saw no reason why he should not seek out Hazel Brandon. His feelings had undergone no diminution, no deadening by reason of change and excitement and peril. The girl's image was bright and

clear in his mind, and the recollection of her engaging ways and sweet and sunny disposition was undimmed. He was not likely to find another like her in one lifetime.

He had been lunching with the Commandant and some of the Police officers. The former's hospitable and unpretentious bungalow was always open house—a hospitality that our friend Dick was fond of availing himself of, for after the time he had spent with the Police, and the hard knocks he had shared with them, he felt as one of themselves; and but for that other attraction would have been in no hurry to bid farewell to a lot of such thundering good fellows, as he defined them on every occasion. Yet now, as he strolled along the wide dusty road, he felt hipped.

"Why, if it isn't Mr. Selmes!"

Dick, who was in a brown study, started at the voice—a feminine voice—then stared. He saw before him the mother of the small boy he had jumped into the sea to save—at some risk to his own life; and he had forgotten her very existence, and the cordial hopes she had expressed that he would one day see his way to paying them a visit. Now she was standing there with a smile and an outstretched hand, the same small boy hanging on to her by the other.

"How do you do, Mrs. Waybridge," said Dick, heartily. "Why, here's Jacky. Well, young 'un, and how's yourself?"

"And Jacky wouldn't have been here but for you," rejoined the other, with feeling. "And——

Dick interrupted.

"Now, Mrs. Waybridge, I think we agreed that that subject was to be treated as—er—a somewhat stale one," he said deprecatorily.

"I'm sure I never agreed to anything of the sort," she laughed. "But who would have thought of finding you here in Komgha. Why—what's the matter with your arm?" becoming alive to the fact that it was in a sling. "You haven't been in the war, have you?"

"Haven't I? Had a most ripping time of it too. By Jingo, if it hadn't been for this confounded scratch, I'd have been in it still. But Blunt turned so solemn over it and ordered me out."

"Who?"

"Blunt, the F.A.M.P. surgeon.

"And so you've come back wounded. But it's not serious?"

"No, indeed. It's a mere scratch. But, what brings you here, Mrs. Waybridge, it's my turn to ask?"

"Why, we live close here; our farm is out towards the Kabousie, only a few miles, and you've got to come and stay with us—now—to-day. Where are you staying here?"

"Nominally at Pagel's, but it's abominably crowded. Practically I subsist at the Commandant's,

or Chambers', or at some other good chap's in the Police. But I'm not stopping on much longer."

"No, you're not, for you're going back with me this afternoon."

Dick, in his heart of hearts, thought this rather a bore, and began to wonder what excuse he could make. It interfered with his plans. The other, reading his thoughts, smiled to herself. She had reason to know what he did not, that there was not the smallest chance of her invite being declined.

"Where is Mr. Greenoak now?" she went on, not giving him time to utter the excuse he was trying to invent.

"Nobody knows, beyond that he's bound on some mysterious mission, its object being to prevent the harmful unnecessary Gaika from taking the war-path."

"Then I hope he'll succeed. We have far too many of them as next-door neighbours. Well, we'll get back to Pagel's and have tea, and then it'll be time to inspan. You haven't got much luggage to pack up, I suppose?"

Dick was amused at the way in which she was taking possession of him as a matter of course. Personally she was a tallish, fair-haired woman of about five and thirty, rather good-looking, and with a pleasing voice. It would be great fun to accept that invitation, if only that Harley Greenoak would come

back to find his bird flown. The said Greenoak had come to the conclusion that his charge could not get into much mischief in a crowded township, and with an arm in a sling, wherefore he had left him for a few days with an easy mind.

Even as Dick had said, the hotel—whither all this time they had been wending—was crowded. The stoep and the bar department were full of men and tobacco smoke, and battles were being fought over again, and the war brought to a sudden and satisfactory termination—according to more than one orator, who might or might not have taken any part in it. In the stuffy little dining-room they managed to find a quiet corner.

"How do you do, Mr. Selmes?"

A red-hot needle dropped down the back of Dick's neck might have produced a precisely similar effect to that evolved by this simple and exceedingly conventional query. He started violently in his chair, knocked both knees hard against the table, causing every article of crockery thereon to dance and rattle, and other people using it to scowl or laugh, according to mood. Then, as he extricated himself, he wondered if he were drunk or dreaming, for he stood holding the hand of—and looking down into the exquisitely winning face of Hazel Brandon.

The said face was demureness itself, but the sparkle of repressed mirth in the witching eyes told its own

tale. Then, conscious that the gaze of the room was on him—on them—Dick pulled himself together.

"You here?" he gasped, as he gave her his chair—in the incoherence of mind born of the circumstances, overlooking the fact that another vacant one next to it, and which he now took, had been turned down as a sign of "engaged." "Er—do you know Mrs. Waybridge?"

"Yes, we know each other," answered the latter for her. "You know"—to Hazel—"I've been trying to persuade Mr. Selmes to come out and stay with us, now this afternoon, but he, for his part, has been trying to find some excuse. Don't deny it, Mr. Selmes"—with a laugh.

Dick felt cornered. Hazel at Komgha! There was no end to the surprises in this land of surprises. Likely he was going somewhere else just as he had discovered her presence here! What times they would contrive to have!

"Well—er—Mrs. Waybridge, I thought it might be more convenient—er—a little later on," he began lamely. "When my damaged limb is quite all right," he added, as if a bright idea had struck him.

"Well, it's our loss, I suppose, Mr. Selmes," she answered. "But mind you come as soon as you can."

Dick promised—even enthusiastically. Then he turned to Hazel.

"Where are you staying here? Are your people with you?"

"No. But I'm not staying here at all. I'm only in for the day. I'm staying with Mrs. Waybridge," she answered in an even, matter-of-fact tone.

Heavens, what was this? Dick felt as if he had kicked himself out of paradise, locked the door behind him and thrown away the key with his own hand. How could he so much as have guessed that he had been doing all he knew to forego another stay under the same roof with Hazel? He stared at his plate—silently, blankly.

"Well, it's about time we thought of inspanning," said Mrs. Waybridge. "Now, Mr. Selmes. It isn't too late to change your mind. What do you say?"

Dick's face cleared. Here was a broad path out. He was unaware, too, of the pressures of the foot under the table exchanged by the two ladies as the richness of the joke unfolded itself. He only knew, with inexpressible relief, that the situation was saved.

"Then I think I will change it," he answered, striving to quell the eagerness in his tone. "Besides, it'll be such a joke on good old Greenoak when he gets back, to find I've flown."

"Where is Mr. Greenoak now?" asked Hazel. "Isn't he here?"

"No. He's away on some secret service.'

"Something to help other people, I suppose," rejoined the girl. "He lives for that."

There was just a little dimming of Dick Selmes' golden vista. Was Hazel going to recommence booming Greenoak? She had never seemed to tire of that at Haakdoornfontein. Then he felt thoroughly ashamed of himself.

"I should think he did live for that," declared Dick, heartily. "He saved my life twice since we crossed the Kei. Do you know, I was twice captured by the Kafirs, and the rum part of it was, it came off before the actual war began; but they'd have done for me all the same, as sure as I sit here—and that in a precious unpleasant manner—if it hadn't been for Greenoak. But it's something of a yarn, and must keep till there's time to tell it. Shall I go and see after your inspanning, Mrs. Waybridge?"

"No. Go and see after your own kit, that'll save time. Only, don't make it bigger than you can help, because the cart isn't a Cobb & Co. coach."

"Will a flannel shirt and a cartridge shell be overweight?" said Dick, slily.

CHAPTER XXV

A MISSING LINK

It is safe to say that no more light-hearted unit among Her Majesty's subjects existed than Dick Selmes as he rode out that day to the Waybridges' farm.

Here he was, suddenly and unexpectedly called upon to undergo a wholly delightful sojourn once more beneath the same roof with this girl who had held his thoughts during the past three months. And now he was resolved to bring things to a head, and somehow he thought he had no reason to despair of doing so. Had he been near enough to catch what was working in the mind of one of the occupants of the Cape cart—which he was not, for his horse, fresh and "beany" from stable confinement and diet, would not be held in to the more sober, jog-trot pace of a vehicle—he might have thought so still more.

In her first glance at him Hazel had decided that, whatever it was that she had found wanting in him before, had now been supplied as though it were the missing link of a chain. The experiences he had been through

since their last meeting had hardened and strengthened Dick Selmes in every way. He had taken part in more than one battle, and had undergone perils such as had fallen to the lot of few—as we know—and such experience had left its mark. He had learned self-reliance in a sharp school, but he had learned it. There was a straight decisive look in his clear eyes which had not been there before, a stamp, too, of it in his features, and now Hazel came to the conclusion that Dick Selmes was the handsomest man she had ever seen, or would ever be likely to see. Even now, how well he looked on horseback. His steed, the same one which had carried him through his express-riding experience, just now was giving ample opportunity for a display of horsemanship; and, watching both from the cart, Hazel realized that small Jacky was but voicing her own verdict in rough and ready fashion when he exclaimed—

"Ma, but Mr. Selmes is a fine chap, and, can't he just ride!"

"And swim too, eh, Jacky?" was the maternal reply, given significantly.

"*Ja.* Rather!"

It was sunset when they reached the farm; whose owner they could see down at the sheep kraals some little way off, apparently engaged in counting in, and at this they would not disturb him. A Kafir stable hand came up to take the horses.

"Come in, Mr. Selmes. My husband will be up directly, when he's done counting. He and Magwelo will do the outspanning."

"Oh, but I can give a hand so long, Mrs. Waybridge. Why—if that isn't Elsie."

"Ay, it's Elsie. And how are ye, Mr. Selmes?" said the Scotswoman, as Dick heartily shook hands with her. "Man, but ye'll have seen something, A'm thinking, since ye first took me for Miss Hazel, up at Mr. Hesketh's."

"Elsie, that joke's stale," cut in Hazel, quickly. "I don't know either that it was ever much of a joke in any case."

And Dick felt grateful. He did not want to be reminded of having made an ass of himself—and that before other people. But the Scotswoman turned away, not in the least offended, however. Soon the owner of the place was seen approaching. He was a middle-aged, strongly built man, with a quiet-looking, shrewd face, thickly bearded, and he was rather reticent of speech.

"John," said his wife, "I've brought you some one you've very much wanted to see—Mr. Selmes."

"Very much wanted to see," echoed the other, heartily. "I should rather think so. How are you, sir—and a thousand welcomes. I need hardly say how glad I am of the opportunity of thanking you in person——"

"No—no, Mr. Waybridge. That's a subject we must agree not to mention," protested Dick. "Really —if only to oblige me."

"There are some subjects that can't be dismissed so lightly," was the answer. "You don't meet with cases of heroism so often as all that."

"Oh, Mrs. Waybridge, do come to my rescue," laughed Dick. "Now I'm going to take refuge in helping to outspan. Hallo! There's my little friend, Florrie. How she's grown."

A pretty little girl came half shyly forward. She and Jacky constituted the Waybridges' surviving family. Waybridge himself had not been present on the occasion of the rescue, his wife and children having been on a visit to Cape Town without him.

This Kaffrarian farm was pleasingly situated; in front and around an undulating roll of mimosa-dotted plains, at the back a line of hills, covered with dark bush. Now, as the sun dropped down to the horizon, these were thrown out all green and gold. At the back of the house was a large fruit garden, fenced in by hedges of quince and pomegranate. The sheep kraals lay in front, at some little distance.

"I'm afraid you'll find it a bit slow here, Mr. Selmes," said Waybridge, as they were seated out on the stoep after supper. "I hear you're a great sportsman, but there's nothing on earth to shoot here."

"Yet all that bush at the back ought to show something," said Dick.

"So it ought, but it doesn't. There are a sight too many Kafirs—and dogs. They won't leave a hoof anywhere within reach. Clear everything."

"That's very nearly what Mr. Selmes did at Haakdoorn," said Hazel, mischievously.

"Ah, that was a very paradise of a shoot," answered Dick, meeting her eyes in the starlight; and she read into the words a meaning beyond what they might on the surface convey, as he intended she should. It was like old times sitting out in the still night with her beside him, he thought. Then the conversation, as it was bound to do, got on to the war, and Dick, being pressed to do so, told them about his adventures. These, as a rule, he avoided talking about lest he should be suspected of brag.

"You see," he now concluded, "you wanted to hear about things, but don't imagine for a moment I'm particularly proud of any of those experiences, because honestly I'm not. The more I look back on them, the more convinced I am that I acted the silly ass; especially in running other people into unnecessary risk to get me out. And if it hadn't been for Greenoak, time after time, I never should have been got out."

"What about Gcalekaland now?" said Waybridge. "Think it's settled?"

"I believe so. The niggers were knocked into a

cocked hat. But what about your crowd round here?" Are they reliable?"

"There is unrest," answered Waybridge. "Yes, decidedly there is unrest. But if we all followed the example of some of our neighbours by running away into laager, it would be courting the very danger we want to avoid. Isn't it a fact that the way to draw any animal after you is to run away from it? Of course; and so some of us made a kind of league to stick to our farms."

"Aren't you uneasy, Mrs. Waybridge?" said Dick.

"Not in the least. I don't believe, either, that the Kafirs would do us any harm. We are on very good terms with them, and the old chief, Nteya, who bosses all the Gaikas round here, is a really nice old man, and we are very friendly. At worst we should be sure to get warning to clear."

"These scares occur from time to time," went on Waybridge, "and one of the results is that your servants all leave. When they come back you may rely upon it that the scare is over. Just now I'm badly off for hands. Four cleared out one night, all Sandili's people. But they'll come back. Nteya's people stayed on, and those are the three I have yet."

Dick Selmes, a lurking anxiety at the back of his mind on account of Hazel, felt reassured. His host's serene composure on the subject could hardly fail to

carry that effect. Then, upon the stillness of the night a far-away, long-drawn sound floated weirdly.

"By Jingo!" he cried, "that reminds me of the war-dance in Vunisa's location that I've just been telling you about. Listen."

They did listen. Again and again the strange sound wailed forth, seeming to come from where a distant glow was now visible beyond a roll of the plain.

"It is a dance of some sort," said Waybridge, "but I don't suppose it's a war-dance. Sounds as if it was over at old Umjuza's kraal, or not far from it. They often go in for dances, maybe for a wedding, or maybe like we do, for the sake of having a little festivity. It's just an extraordinary beer-drinking, I expect."

But to one who had heard it before, in grim and sinister earnest, that sound coming out of the darkness, as the voices of ravening beasts straining to be let loose, combined, too, with the state of uneasiness and tension then existing, struck a feeling of vague inquietude. Dick Selmes wondered if he felt as reassured as his host's explanation and unruffled serenity should have warranted him in feeling.

CHAPTER XXVI

GREENOAK'S PLAN

HARLEY GREENOAK sat smoking a pipe in the one living-room of the Commandant's modest little bungalow. It was night. The only other occupant of the room was its owner; and he was moving tranquilly about arranging his "specimens," dividing his attention about evenly between these and the subject of conversation. Yet the latter was weighty with the issues of life and death.

"If things go as you say, Greenoak," he was observing, "we haven't a man too many; either here, or over the Kei, or indeed along the whole frontier. Yet, look how my hands are tied. You know, I was always against allowing those burgher forces to go home, at any rate until a sufficiently equivalent force had been raised to supply their place. I am hampered at every turn, and if it wasn't that I believe we are only at the beginning of our troubles instead of the end, I'd resign."

"Don't do that, Commandant, if only that it would

be a precious difficult thing to supply yours," answered Greenoak.

"I advised what should be done, and that was to make a quick and secret march, and arrest Sandili and Matanzima, together with some half-dozen more mischievous of the *amapakati* whom *we* know, and promise to hang the lot on the first outbreak among their people. When I put it to the Government I was forbidden to move. You know the rest."

Greenoak nodded. The other went on—

"Look what came of bagging those other two, Vunisa and Pahlandhle. Their Reserve has been fairly well behaved ever since. We can't hang *them* because the Gcalekas are an independent nation, but their people don't know we can't, and so are behaving themselves for fear we should. But the Colonial tribes are British subjects, and therefore rebels if they begin the row, so there'd be no 'prisoner of war' treatment for them. By the way, what has become of that hair-brained young dare-devil who helped us to grab them? I don't seem to have seen him about lately."

"Dick Selmes? Oh, he's being taken care of," answered Greenoak, drily. "He's over at Waybridge's farm. He's got an attraction there."

"H'm. Well, but if you start on this undertaking you'll have to leave him to himself for a while. And you're his bear leader."

"He won't object to that," laughed Greenoak.

"And he seems by this time to be uncommonly well able to take care of himself."

"So I should think. And I always thought you kept him quite enough in leading strings. No, it's no good. I can't satisfactorily locate this beast even now," bringing to the light a small wooden box from which he had just removed the lid, and which contained the identical specimen of the lizard tribe which we saw him puzzling over in the small hours of the morning which had witnessed the attack on the Kangala camp. "I didn't bring the right book. I shall have to wait until I get back to my library."

King Williamstown was the official headquarters of the F.A.M. Police, and there the Commandant owned a roomy and commodious bungalow, which contained a varied library, well stocked with standard works dealing with his favourite science.

Now he replaced the box and went over to the window. It was open, but the blind was down. This he pulled up and stood gazing meditatively out into the night, as though to penetrate darkness and space to where the plotting chiefs were even then arranging for the wave of steel and torch which should presently sweep the land. In good sooth he might well feel anxious. He was a singularly observant and keen-minded man, with a cool, matter-of-course courage that would stick at nothing once his judgment had commended any given line of action as necessary. He

had consistently maintained that, given a free hand, he would have guaranteed there should have been no outbreak at all in the first instance; when such had befallen, he was confident of his power to stem it, but again he was hampered by official orders and counter orders. And now, when the most dangerous outbreak of all was imminent, once again Red Tape wriggled its way in.

Greenoak, seated back in his armchair, refilled and lit his pipe in silence. He too was busy with his own thoughts, and forebore to interrupt those of his friend. These two men, who understood each other so well, were both of the concentrative order of mind, and when there was anything of importance to be thought out, they thought it out thoroughly, and round and round. Here there was something very important indeed, an enterprise which held out to Harley Greenoak quite as big a chance of losing his life as any he had ever taken. But that was not what engaged his attention for the most part. It was the chance of failure, and all that such would involve. The Commandant's favourite dogs, two beautiful black spaniels, which had just leaped in through the open window, came frisking up to him, wagging their tails, and whining for notice. Mechanically his hand passed over each glossy head, and still there was silence between the two men. Then the Commandant shut down the window and turned into the room again.

"Well, Greenoak, if any other man was bound on this errand, I should say it would be useless. But yourself——"

"I shall feel the pulse of the locations anyway, and can gauge pretty accurately whether the farmers who are still sticking to their places ought to leave. I'll have a good talk with Matanzima."

"Not Sandili?"

"Sheer waste of time. He'd be too drunk."

"You may find a difficulty in getting away. In any case, you'll be shadowed at every step."

Greenoak laughed drily as he toyed with the spaniels' ears.

"I don't want to brag," he said, "but we've known each other a long time. Did you ever know me 'shadowed' to any purpose by any one I didn't intend should shadow me?"

"No, I can't say I did. I don't believe any one ever did."

"Well, it happened once—not long ago either. And who the dickens do you think succeeded in doing it?"

"Who?"

"Our young friend, Dick Selmes. No more, no less." And he told the other, briefly, of his enterprise in Slaang Kloof.

"Well, that doesn't count, for of course he guessed where you were bound for, and the distance

and surroundings were so trifling that there was no opportunity of throwing him off the scent. Here, of course, it's different. You're a wonderful fellow, Greenoak, but I don't know why your glass has been standing empty so long. Here. Fill up!

Several glasses already used, and a large but more than half-emptied decanter on the table—item a good deal of tobacco ash, pointed to the fact that some of the Police officers and an outside friend or two had been spending the evening with the Commandant. The latter now charged his glass, and pushed the excellent Boer brandy—whisky was hardly known on the frontier in those days—over to Greenoak.

"We'll drink success, at any rate," he said, "to the 'secret service' department." Then, after a pause, "Upon my word, Greenoak, I wish you'd throw up this undertaking."

Greenoak, for him, looked somewhat surprised. In all the years of their acquaintance he had never known the Commandant in an expostulatory vein. He was habitually the most matter-of-fact and laconic of men. Could it be that he was ageing?

"Oh, I'm getting rusty here, and spoiling for the chance of putting something or somebody to rights," was the answer.

By this time it was well known that the Gaika locations were in a frame of mind that may best be described as smouldering. So far the grog-sodden

mind of Sandili was incapable of deciding anything. Whoever got the old chief's ear last spoke the "word" that was "good." But his warrior son, Matanzima, and the young men of the tribe, were spoiling for a chance to distinguish themselves. The spirit of Donnybrook was dangerously abroad.

But their kinsmen, the Gcalekas, across the Kei, had been badly defeated and their country cleared—this, then, was no time for a rising on the Colonial side. So one would have thought, but a short-sighted policy had allowed one by one of the burgher forces in the Transkei to evacuate that territory without supplying their place. The war was over, it was pronounced. Was it? Back came the defeated paramount tribe, swarming into its old country again; the Paramount Chief, Kreli, as paramount as ever, and laughing at the "softness" of the white man. These were now plotting to stir up the intra-Colonial tribes, and by a simultaneous rising on the part of these to drive the said white man "into the sea," as their expressive way of putting it ran.

This plot was, of course, suspected by many, and known by few, but it was reserved for Harley Greenoak to find out through one of those mysterious sources of information that seemed closed to others, that the time for its execution was imminent. An accredited body of Gcaleka fighting men was to cross the Kei into Sandili's location, and their arrival was

to be the signal that the moment for rising had come. Thousands upon thousands of armed savages would thus hold the frontier at their mercy. It was too late to prevent this. The only course was to neutralize it, by being prepared. And the bulk of the armed force upon the border had been withdrawn.

Harley Greenoak got up and went to his room. He took down his guns and drew them from their holsters. The double ·500 Express was deadly with big game, but he was not sure he did not prefer the rifle and smooth-bore for man. A charge of Treble A. buckshot was so deadly at anything like close quarters. Yes, he would take the one with the shot barrel. It, with his ordinary and very business-like revolver, constituted a most formidable armament, in the hands of one who so thoroughly knew how to use it as himself. Returning to the other room, he proceeded to load up a saddle-bag with a supply of the most concentrated and therefore portable provisions, sufficient to last him several days; but, to all appearances, hardly enough to last him for one.

"You'll find Mantisa at the place arranged, all right," said the Commandant, naming one of the native detectives. "He's a good runner, and will bring the news straight and quick—directly you get any to send. John Voss had better be sent round to warn the farms."

The other nodded, and the two men shook hands. The lights were then extinguished, for it was just as

well that possible watching eyes should not see Harley Greenoak as he stepped forth into the darkness. And having saddled up his horse, he started upon his dangerous and self-sacrificing undertaking alone.

As he rode on through the night, keeping his horse at a walk, his thoughts were still busy with his plan. He had not told the Commandant of the expected crossing, and this for more than one reason. First, he wanted to verify his information, and this he felt confident of his ability to do, by going in person among the disaffected Gaikas. His consummate knowledge of natives and their language, above all of the *ways* of their language, would enable him to do this. He could read them like a book, however much they strove to conceal from him their real mind. Then he was not altogether without hope that he might be able, even at the eleventh hour, to persuade them to "sit still." His personal prestige with them, and influence, were enormous, and while they would secretly be laughing at any accredited Government official, to his own words they would listen with unfeigned respect. Again, were a strong patrol of Police despatched to watch the drifts, it would defeat its own object. It would be powerless to prevent the projected incursion, for the Gcaleka emissaries, being aware of its presence, as, of course, they could not fail to be, would simply melt into twos and threes, and cross the river at many different points instead of at one. Further and more

important still, it would precipitate the outbreak he was striving to delay, even if he could not prevent; and such of the settlers who still remained on their farms would be massacred without warning. And this was just what he had set himself out to avert, this strong, brave, experienced man — he alone — single-handed.

But what of himself—of his own life? Did he not value it that he was going to place himself alone in the power of these sullen plotting savages? Well, this was not the first situation of the kind in which he had played the leading and only part. It was by just such cool and calculated intrepidity, by just such well-nigh superhuman confidence in his own personality and resource, that Harley Greenoak had come forth, not merely with his life, but triumphant and successful where ninety-nine men out of a hundred would never have come forth at all.

The settlement, largely augmented by tents and waggons of refugees, was in darkness, as he left it behind. Down by the outspan quite a number of waggons had formed a laager, but from this came no challenge as he passed it near by. Either its inmates were asleep, or the sound of a horse travelling at a foot's pace conveyed no suggestion of danger. The open veldt lay in front, the great table-topped cone of Moordenaar's Kop towering on high against the myriad stars.

But—what was this? Behind, not too near, but just near enough to keep the horseman within sight, within hearing, a stealthy form was flitting. Seen in the darkness, it was that of an evil-looking, thick-set savage, with a forbidding countenance dotted unevenly with scrabbly wisps of beard. In his hand was a pair of hard iron-wood sticks, and one assegai, with a broad, keen, fluted blade.

The rider held carelessly on. His horse, purposely kept unshod, gave little sound from its footfalls; himself, perfect in his self-restraint, foregoing even the comfort of a harmless pipe. Harmless, yes—under most conditions; under existing ones, the mere faint spark of light required for its ignition was a thing to be avoided, lest it should reach the wrong eyes, small as might be the chance of it doing so. But his habit was to take no chances in a matter of life and death.

Hour after hour—then a short off-saddle, then on again, and still the stealthy form moved silently, cautiously behind, always keeping its distance lest the horse should neigh, or otherwise show signs of uneasiness. Harley Greenoak was being shadowed.

CHAPTER XXVII

IN THE LOCATIONS

SUNRISE. A long green valley bounded by pleasant, round-topped, bush-clad hills. The slopes are dotted with kraals, the blue wood-smoke curling aloft from the yellow thatch of many a beehive-shaped hut, the red-ochred forms of the inhabitants moving about—early as it is—making a not unpleasing contrast to the eye against the bright green of the pastures, though by no means pleasing to another sense, at far closer quarters. But the thorn enclosures contain no cattle, although it is milking-time, nor do any stand around outside, only a few sheep and goats. This is strange.

Harley Greenoak, pacing his horse up the valley, noted the fact, and—read it at its real meaning. And its real meaning did not augur well either for the situation or for his self-imposed mission by which he had hoped to improve the latter. But little time was to be his for tranquil reflection, for there was a savage rush of dogs from two of the clusters of huts he was passing at a hundred yards or so, and a tumultuous snapping and snarling round his horse's heels. It was

followed immediately by a scarcely less tumultuous irruption of the inhabitants. These poured forward, vociferating volubly. All had sticks, and a goodly proportion carried assegais. Their demeanour was not friendly.

But the foremost pulled up short, then the rest. The rush subsided into a walk.

"*Whau!* It is Kulondeka!"

No weapon had been presented, or even significantly handled. No change had come over the imperturbability of the horseman. It was only the name, the mesmerism, so to say, of the personality. That was all.

"I see you," was the answer. "But I did not come to see *you*." And the speaker rode unconcernedly on.

The crowd, who had now stoned and beaten off the dogs, fell in behind, talking in an undertone among itself. From every additional kraal passed, others came forth to swell it, at first aggressively hostile in attitude, then more subdued, but always sullen. In fact, Greenoak remarked that the prevailing attitude was that of sullenness.

"The grass is green and abundant. There should be good pasture for the cattle here now," he remarked over his shoulder to the foremost. "There will be plenty of fatness and milk this season."

A deep-toned murmur, in which he was quick to detect a covert sneer, greeted his words.

"*Ewa—Ewa!* Plenty of fatness this season,

Kulondeka," answered several voices. And the same unmistakable sneer underlay the words.

"Turn back, Kulondeka," now said one, a man who seemed to be in some authority, as he came up alongside of the horseman. "We do not want any white people about here now. The chief is tired of them."

"The chief! But it is not the chief I am going to see, Mafutana. It is his son."

"But what if he is not here?" said the Kafir, sullenly.

"But what if he is?" returned Greenoak, composedly. "I know my way. I have no need of these here"—with a wave of the hand towards those who were following. "They can go home."

A hoarse jeer among the crowd greeted the words, but the said crowd showed not the slightest sign of complying with the speaker's wish. More than one, gripping the long, tapering assegai, was thinking what a tempting target was offered by the back of this unmoved white man, riding there before them as though his life hung upon something stronger than a not very secure rope. So the strange procession passed on.

The newly risen sun was flaming above the Kei hills. The blue sky was without a cloud. The morning air, not yet unpleasantly warm, was clear and invigorating. The fair, rolling pastures were green and promising, and altogether the whole scene should

have been one of pastoral peace. But it was the peace of the slumbering volcano, to-day stillness, to-morrow red ruin, and none knew this better than Harley Greenoak. He knew why there was no cattle anywhere in sight.

Now he had reached a kraal at the head of the valley, one in no wise differing in appearance from any of the others he had passed. Here he dismounted, but before he could make an inquiry of the inhabitants—the crowd following him, by the way, having now halted at a respectful distance—an interruption occurred—startling, unexpected.

A large body of Kafirs came pouring over the ridge. They were in full war-array—cow-tail tufts, flapping monkey-skins, long crane feathers flowing back from the head, jackals' teeth necklaces—in short, every conceivable variety of wild and fantastic adornment which could lend to the sinuous clay-smeared forms a wholly terrific appearance. And indeed such was the effect, as with a roar like that of a beast they rushed down upon Harley Greenoak.

He, for his part, stood unmoved; though even to one of his iron resolution the array of excited faces and gleaming eyeballs, and threatening assegais, as the savages crowded up to him, might well have proved momentarily unnerving. Was this the projected Gcaleka raid, he wondered, and in a flash he decided that it was not. It was a body of young men who had

spent the night war-dancing, with its concomitant of beef and beer feasting, hard by; and, now excited by such stimulant, mental and physical, was prepared for anything.

They made mock thrusts at him with their assegais —not too near, however. Others were leaping into the air, singing, or reciting all the deeds they were about to do.

"The time of the *Abelungu* * has come!" cried one, if possible more truculent and demoniacal-looking than his fellows. "*Whau!* but we will drive them all into the sea, and take their wives for our wives. Have you a wife, Kulondeka? But no. She would be too old. She, and others like her, would do to hoe our corn lands. Or——"

And the speaker made a quick, downward slash with his assegai that left room for no explanation in mere words.

Greenoak listened to all this—and more—in silent contempt. He was getting rather tired of it, and expected that they would be getting the same directly, and would go. But the most truculent of them, a huge, red-smeared brute of well-nigh gigantic proportions, lunged forward and snatched hold of the double gun which he held in his left hand, attempting with a quick powerful jerk to wrest it away.

He did not succeed. In a twinkling the muzzle of

* Whites.

Greenoak's heavy revolver caught him fair and square between the eyes, with such force that the impact alone was almost enough to brain him, apart from the roar of the detonation which immediately followed. The huge barbarian, his head blown to atoms, crashed to the ground like a felled tree.

For a moment there was a tense and deathly silence. Greenoak, still holding the pistol pointed, had taken a couple of paces backward. His grey eyes were gleaming like steel, and his whole aspect was cool and dangerous. The time for indifference was past, he had decided; that for action had come; and the man who had ventured to lay a hand on him had paid for his daring with his life. At that moment he himself hardly expected to escape with his, but it would go terribly hard with several, before, in their weight of numbers, they should succeed in taking it. Now, he wasted no word. His silence, the lightning-like promptitude with which he had acted, and with which he would be ready to act again, as they well knew, were more awe-inspiring than mere verbal warning. And then there was the prestige of his personality.

Upon the silence broke forth a deep-toned, vengeful growl that was ominous. Then it suddenly died down. A voice behind him spoke.

"It is Kulondeka I see."

"It is," answered Greenoak, not turning his head. "And I think, son of the Great Chief, that these had

better go home. It is not a healthy amusement for any man to try and snatch my gun out of my hand."

At these words, cool and contemptuous, a new outburst of wrath went up, and the excited savages began to crowd up nearer, clamouring that Kulondeka should be given up to their vengeance. Some in the background raised the war-cry. It was taken up, and, gathering volume, sounded back from the hills, whence now other bands were hurrying to the scene. The chief's son stepped to the side of Harley Greenoak and threw an arm around his shoulders.

"See. We are brothers," he said. "The Great Chief is the father of both."

Again there was a silence, broken immediately by a voice.

"*Au!* The son of the Great Chief is bewitched. This Kulondeka is the eyes and ears of the whites—here, everywhere. How then can he, too, be the son of the Great Chief?" And a fresh outburst greeted the words.

Greenoak noticed that this was the man who had tried to turn him back. He had thrust himself forward, and being a headman of some standing, and elderly, he might prove dangerous in the scale. And his leanings were hostile.

Matanzima drew himself up. It was time to assert his dignity, and he had plenty of it. Seen outwardly

now, he was a lithe, straight, well-set-up savage, with clear eyes and a decidedly pleasing face. He wore an ample kaross of leopard skin, flung loosely around him, and but for this, and a massive ivory armlet, displayed no adornment whatever. Now he turned his eyes sternly upon the assembled rout, sweeping it steadily from end to end with his glance.

"Have I no men?" he said, in slow, incisive tones. "Have I no men? Then who are these? Are they Mafutana's dogs, or are they mine? *Hau!* There are dogs who bark too loud, but when it comes to biting slink away with their tails down. How is it with these? I lead not such dogs to war."

The clamourers paused, shamefaced. Matanzima was immensely popular with the younger men; in fact, was regarded as the leader and hope of the war-party. They dared not actively oppose him. They knew, too, that but for this white man, for whose blood they were thirsting, he would never have been here to lead them. The clamour seemed to be dying out.

"What of Nzinto yonder, son of the Great Chief?" cried a voice. "He is the son of my father, and lo! —he lies dead."

"M—m̀!" The deep-chested murmur from the crowd backed the words. All eyes were bent eagerly upon Matanzima.

"Why, as to that," said the latter, "you have heard Kulondeka say that it is not healthy to try

and snatch a gun from his hand. Nzinto tried to, and——"

"Yet it shall be blood for blood, son of Sandili," was the answer, "for he was my brother."

"Kulondeka is *my* brother," returned Matanzima. "Or, I should say, my father, for what am I but a boy beside him? Yet no blood for blood shall it be here. If you meet in battle—well and good, the best warrior is he who wins. Now we have talked long enough. *I* think—too long."

And linking his arm within that of Greenoak, he drew him towards the hut from which he himself had just emerged, at the same time making a sign to one of his own immediate attendants to take charge of the horse, which, its first uneasiness over, was placidly cropping the grass, its bridle trailing on the ground.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE "PULSE OF THE PEOPLE"

HARLEY GREENOAK was not sorry to exchange the riot and racket outside for the cool interior of the young chief's hut. The latter was by no means as neat and clean as he had been wont to find in similar dwellings among the Zulus; because the Xosa has a sort of passion for grease—and dogs. Two of the latter got up growling as he entered, but slunk out of the doorway with astonishing celerity at a peremptory word from their master. Then two of Matanzima's wives appeared, bearing food, in the shape of stamped mealies and curdled milk, also a large calabash of native beer, and here again there was a suggestion of but half-washed vessels, and a flavour of grease and red-ochre seemed to permeate the stuff itself. But to Greenoak little matters of this sort were the merest trifles.

"It is good to see you again, Kulondeka," said the young chief, when breakfast was well under way. "Now—what is the news?"

"News? Why as for that, son of Sandili, the news is great."

"Great?"

"It is. And such as it is I bring it from—no further distance from here than I could shoot with this gun."

"Ha!"

The ejaculation, quick and eager; a sudden intensity wherewith the answer had been received was not lost on Harley Greenoak. As we heard him tell the Commandant, he was here to feel the pulse of the people. Already he had got his finger upon it.

"The people are mad, son of the Great Chief," he went on. "Mad—quite mad. The people here."

Matanzima laughed—and it struck his hearer there was a note of great relief in the tone.

"Why, as to that, Kulondeka," he said, "they are only a little excited. They are all young men, those out yonder. They have been dancing all night, and have not worn it off. But—mad? *Au!*"

"And Mafutana, and Sikonile, and others who gave me speech on the way hither—are they young men, and have they been dancing all night?" said Greenoak, innocently, and with his head on one side. "They talked 'dark' as they followed on behind me, but—not dark enough, son of Sandili. Ah—ah—not dark enough. They are mad. Shall I say why?"

The young chief nodded and uttered a murmur of assent.

"Then why are the children of the House of Gaika preparing for war?"

This was putting things straightly. Matanzima brought his hand to his mouth with a quick exclamation. Then, laughing softly, he shook his head.

"Now, nay, Kulondeka," he said. "You are my father, but your dreams have been bad. The war was not with us, and it is over now. And I would ask—If we sat still then, if we did not rise in our might to aid our brethren over yonder, would it not be the act of fools and madmen to rise now, when there is no one to aid, and the whites are all armed and prepared? Now, would it not?"

"It would. It would be the act of just such as these. That is why I say that the news I bring is that your people are all mad, Matanzima."

The latter did not immediately answer, and Greenoak sat and watched him. Such words, uttered by any other man, would have been equivalent to the signing of his death-warrant. But Greenoak knew his ground. He had saved the life of the young chief once, and he knew that the latter would never forget it as long as he lived. Moreover, between the two there was a very genuine liking, and a longing to save this fine young fool from the ruinous consequences of the

mad, impracticable scheme on which he was already embarking had borne a full part in moving him to start upon his perilous undertaking.

"*Whau!* Kulondeka. Are you sent by Iruvumente?" *

"Not so, Matanzima. Yet the answers I am getting might well make it appear as though I were. For they are just the answers that might be got ready for a Government commissioner."

The other laughed again, but just a trifle shamefacedly. He knew, only too well, the utter futility of trying to hoodwink this one man of all others. The latter went on—

"Where are all the cattle belonging to the people? The land here is green and the grass soft and fresh. Who would have thought the pasture in the Gombazana Forest could be better?"

Here again was food for fresh discomfiture. For how should Kulondeka have known so accurately that the tribe had been steadily sending away all its women and children to the wooded fastnesses he had mentioned, in order to have its hands free entirely? Yet what did not Kulondeka know?

"For that," answered Matanzima, "there may be some reason. The Ama Gcaleka might come over and seize some of our cattle to make up for all your people took from them, what time we did not aid them. Ah

* The Government.

—ah! What time we did not aid them," he added significantly.

"If you feared that, why did you not send word to Bokelo?" said Greenoak, using the name by which the Commandant was known among the tribes. "He would have sent sufficient *Amapolise* to patrol the border, so that such a thing could not have befallen."

The look on Matanzima's face at the mention of such a contingency would have escaped pretty nearly any other man than Harley Greenoak. Him it did not escape. Yes. He was getting his finger more and more tightly on "the pulse."

"When there is lightning in the air, does a man go about flourishing steel," was the reply, with another amused laugh. "*Whau!* some of our people are hot-headed, and not always clear-sighted—as you yourself have just seen," he added whimsically. "There has been lightning in the air, and Bokelo's *Amapolise* might be just the steel which should draw down the crash."

"Now, listen to me, Matanzima, and we will talk 'dark' no longer," said Greenoak, becoming impressive. "You have referred to me as your 'father,' and that is just what I want to be to you. I want to see you great and powerful, and at the head of your nation. I do not want to see you—with others—spend the rest of your life in the white man's prison. The Great Chief, Sandili, is old and infirm, and are you not his 'great'

son? It cannot be long before you yourself are Chief of the House of Gaika! *Whau!* look around. Is it not a splendid land which is given you wherein to dwell? Are not the people prosperous and happy, with cattle grazing by their tens of thousands in valley and on hill? Why, then, fling all this away with both hands? Why exchange it all—for what? Ask those of your people who have passed years of their lives in the white man's prison, for any offence against the white man's laws. Ask such what it feels like—day after day—moon after moon—toiling at road-making, dragging heavy carts loaded with heavy stones, watched and guarded every moment by, it may be, some miserable Hottentot, ready to shoot you down at any attempt to escape, sometimes in chains it may be. *Whau!* What a fate for the chiefs of the House of Gaika. Come heat, come cold—ever the same weary round of toil. Then again—no home, no comfortable huts, no wives, no tobacco—nothing to look forward to but the most miserable and grinding slavery. That is the fate you are rushing upon headlong. The fate that will as surely be yours as that the sun is shining above at this moment. You and your people are not as the Ama Gcaleka. They are Kreli's men, and you and the Ama Ngqika are the Queen's men. This is the way the laws of the white men punish those who rise in rebellion against the Queen. Now say. Is it good enough? Is it?"

Greenoak paused, and sat gazing fixedly at his listener. The young chief's face had grown troubled and moody.

"*Whau!* Such words are even as the words of Tyala," he said, as though half to himself.

"The words of Tyala," echoed Greenoak, eager to push his advantage. "Ha! And Tyala is wise—no man wiser. Now, Matanzima. You have the ear of the Great Chief. Go now and speak into it, word for word, all I have been saying. Lose no time, do it at once. So shall you save not only yourself, but your people. To delay is death. Where is Sandili?"

"Near Tembani. But I cannot go to him now, Kulondeka," he explained gloomily. "Do you not see? The people here. I alone can hold them."

Yes, that "pulse" was beating now, that pulse of the people which Harley Greenoak was there to feel. There was no chance of making a wrong diagnosis here. But a great sinking came into his heart. More and more, while reasoning with this young leader of the seething war-party, his mind had been impregnated with a growing pity for him, and the dreary intolerable doom he was so surely preparing for himself and many more. For, reading the other, more and more easily he realized that it was too late for the young chief to draw back. The plot had about reached its head. The incursion from beyond the river was all

arranged, and its fulfilment imminent. Yet—was it too late?

"Then—hold them," he answered emphatically. "Hold them. Have you no men? Send and recall the cattle and women that have been sent away. Send out another 'word'—that the time is not ripe. Think, son of Sandili, the last chief of the House of Gaika; for no other will be chief after him when the whole nation is broken up. There is yet time. It is not too late. Now, I have ridden the night through, and I am growing old. While I sleep—for I am tired—think again upon my words; and—act upon them, and that at once."

Greenoak rose, and going to the side of the hut, stretched himself upon the ground. In less than five minutes he slept, slept hard and dreamlessly. Slept—one man, alone—in the midst of teeming enemies, who but a short while before had been clamouring for his life, and even now, it might be, were plotting how they might take it when he should be once clear of the protecting presence of their chief. The sanctuary of the latter's house they dared not violate. But blood had been shed, and blood cried for blood. It would be hard if they could not, by way of wily ambuscade, obtain their just vengeance when this man should be beyond the protecting influence. The prestige of his personality was great; still he was but one, and they were many. Vast events were maturing; the making

an end, then, of this man, with the semi-supernatural reputation for invulnerability, would be a fitting precursor of them.

But Harley Greenoak was still Harley Greenoak, and meanwhile he slumbered on, peacefully and unafraid, in their midst. Would he have slept on so soundly had he known what was going on in another part of the location? Who knows?

CHAPTER XXIX

MAFUTANA'S PLAN

SIKONILE's hut was full. Sikonile's hut, being full, was exceedingly close and stuffy. Moreover, it was thick with tobacco smoke; for, unlike the Zulus, both men and women of the Xosa tribes were great smokers, and so thick was the cloud, having no egress but by percolating through the thatch roof, that none but Kafir eyes could have remained open in it for two consecutive minutes. This, with the fœtid, musky, human odour combined with that of more or less rancid grease, would have sent the ordinary white man promptly outside, feeling very sea-sick indeed. No white man, however, was there; incidentally a very lucky thing for the white man, and that for other reasons than the one just given.

Sikonile was an elderly Kafir, and the expression of his massive, bearded countenance was scowling and vindictive as he sat gloomily puffing at his long-stemmed angular pipe. And this was scarcely wonderful, seeing that he was the father of Nzinto, the man whom Harley Greenoak had just shot dead. The

fact that the deceased had brought his fate upon his own head did not count for much towards mending matters.

"The people might as well lie down again," he was saying, continuing the debate, which had already reached a heated pitch. "'It is not healthy to attempt to snatch a gun from the hand of Kulondeka,'" he quoted, with a sneer. "*Hau!* Had I been there then, Kulondeka would have found it 'not healthy' to shoot down the children of Gaika, here in their own home. Yet, a number of us, all armed, slunk away like stoned curs. *Hau!* like stoned and beaten curs!"

A fierce murmur greeted his words. He went on—

"And such call themselves men. And they all slink away before one. Men! *Hau!* I call them dogs. And if they slink away before one white, what will they do when many whites are arrayed against them? What is all this talk about driving the whites into the sea when they are afraid of a single one, alone in their midst? Why, our women would make better warriors than they."

Most of those present, elderly or middle-aged men themselves, had sons who had been among the uproarious demonstrators; and liked not the contemptuous denunciation of the speaker. One now spoke.

"Not at the bidding of the white man did they hold their hands, Sikonile, but at the word of the chief."

"The word of the chief," echoed Sikonile, sneeringly savage. "*Au!* but Matanzima is not a chief. He is the son of the Great Chief, but he is a boy."

"Yet he is the one to whom all these look up," put in another. "The time to take vengeance was not yet."

"Not yet? But will it ever be?" cried Sikonile, flinging out an arm and glaring around. "You are all afraid of this white man—afraid. *Hau!*"

The disgust and contempt of his tone, especially as conveyed by the last exclamation, stung them somewhat.

"Kulondeka is no ordinary white man," said some one, sullenly. "There is that of *tagati* about him. Many have tried to kill him, and he is still alive. But —where are they?"

"Cowards all! Fools and cowards! They deserved their death," was the fierce rejoinder.

"Yet, brother," went on the one who had spoken last, "Kulondeka is here among us alone. It is thy son whom he has killed, but thou hast other sons. Matanzima is no chief—only the child of one. Yonder is his hut, and the white man is here. Now take thy other sons, and go and kill him."

There was a touch of mockery in the tone. The words were, in fact, a challenge. Sikonile leapt to his feet.

"That will I do!" he blared forth, gesticulating

with anger, for he was worked up to a blaze of revengeful exaltation. "That will I do!" And tearing down a bundle of assegais which hung against the side of the hut, he made for the door. But before he could gain it another voice spoke.

"Pause, brother. I have a better plan than that."

The angry man paused.

"A better plan!" he sneered. "Plans—always plans! *Whau!* I like not such. We have heard too much of plans lately. It is now time to act. One act is worth ten times ten plans. Yet, what is thy 'plan,' Mafutana?"

"Hear it then, Sikonile. What sort of poor revenge would it be to kill Kulondeka, to kill him at once so that he feels nothing, and to get thyself and thy sons killed for violating the house of the son of the Great Chief—for this is surely what would happen? Should we not rather collect our sons together, and, stealing out from the kraals by twos and threes, meet after dark, and take him when he leaves to-night to return home? For he will leave to-night."

A murmur of applause met this proposal. The vengeful father was impressed.

"Why, that is something of a plan," he said. "But what if it should fail? Yet, it should not."

"It should not, for it will be easy," was the answer.

"We can ambush every way by which he will leave. Then, think what your revenge will be. We will carry him to the 'Place of the Bones,' and spend the night burning him alive, even as we did the traitor Nemvu. *Whau!* what an end for Kulondeka! A great, a noble end. You, Sikonile, in each of his groans, as the fire eats into sinew and flesh and nerve, will hear the glad laughter of Nzinto, whom he slew. Now, say. Is not my plan the better? It will avoid trouble, for Matanzima, to whom all the fighters look up, will never know. And, what a noble revenge it will afford thee."

An emphatic hum of approval went up from the entire gathering. Mafutana was a genius. And then all heads were grouped together in an eager, undertoned discussion, and, seen through the thick, dim smoke-cloud, the grim ferocious faces were as those of demons exulting over the torment of a newly acquired soul.

Harley Greenoak awoke at sundown, aroused by a light touch from his host, who had been watching carefully over his safety.

"It is nearly time to depart, Kulondeka," said the latter. "To have done so earlier would not have been safe, to remain later would not be safe either; for, bear in mind, I am not the Great Chief, but only his child. And he has other children."

There was significance in this. The very short twilight—for darkness falls suddenly under Southern skies—was used by Greenoak in solemnly repeating his former warnings. Then, when it was dark enough, they went outside, where the horse was already standing, all ready and saddled.

"Fare thee well, son of the Great Chief," said Greenoak as he mounted. "My heart is sore for thee and the people if my words pass unheeded. I can say no more."

Matanzima's face was gloomy, and his tones sad as he answered—

"Fare thee well, Kulondeka. Who can alter or foresee his fate? For thyself, ride with care this night, and with wide-open eyes. Yet, who am I to offer counsel to one such as thee."

The dark shadows of the adjacent bush, soon gained, swallowed up the rider. But he knew it in the dark as in the daylight; knew it as well as—even better than—the savages whose home it was, and who were even then lying, spread out in a line covering some distance, lurking, eager, every faculty of sight and hearing, and even scent, at the fullest tension as they awaited their sure and certain prey. Would they seize it? Such seemed indeed probable, for now, to make assurance doubly sure, not only lay the waiting enemy in front, but behind, stealthily flitting on, keeping the horseman ever in sight, moved a single form—that of an evil,

thick-set, scrabbly bearded savage—the same whom we saw dogging his way in the darkness when he first set forth upon his perilous mission: the bulk, indeed, of whose peril had yet to be encountered.

Gaining the high ground, which should shut the valley from view, Greenoak looked back. The location lay beneath, quiet under the stars. A twinkle of light from some open hut door or the spark of an outside fire showed in the distance, but there was no sound of dancing or revelry. The night air blew fresh and sweet as he plunged down into a deep bushy valley.

Listening intently, he gave forth the cry of a night bird, then again. It was answered. Dismounting, he led his horse a few paces—then halted, soothing the animal, as a figure rose out of the gloom with rather startling suddenness. But its apparition seemed to convey no alarm to Harley Greenoak, for between him and it there now followed a short, low-toned, but very emphatic and earnest conference.

"*Whau!*" ejaculated Mafutana, in a smothered whisper. "Do you hear anything, brother?"

Sikonile, raising his head, seemed to be trying to pierce the darkness. His broad nostrils snuffed the night air, like those of a buck.

"He comes," was the answer.

Rapidly the word was passed along the line of crouching savages. And now the soft footfall of an

unshod horse was plainly audible, advancing straight towards them. Hands gripped assegai hafts with fierce and bloodthirsty thrill, yet no weapon was to be used. The white man was to be taken alive, and, as their plans had been laid, he would easily be so taken. A mandate was issued by Mafutana to some of the young men, and these moved quickly away down the hill, widening out so that they should give the advancing horseman time to get within the toils, yet not too near, lest the horse should wind them and show alarm.

Along the dark ridge the crouching savages lay, tense with excitement; every head raised, listening, like that of some evil snake. Then a quick gasp escaped them. Just below there was the thud of a heavy fall, and the plunging of frantic hoofs, the jingle of a bit, and the rattle of stones. Like lightning they were up and sweeping down upon the spot. But no sound was uttered. This had to be brought through in silence.

Already as they arrived, their forerunners had raised the fallen horse, which stood trembling and snorting in terror, and had flung themselves upon and pinioned its rider. Others grinned as they untied the long reims which, extended from bush stump to bush stump across the path, had composed the trap which had effected their capture so easily and bloodlessly.

Sikonile came forward with a grin of hate upon his countenance that was simply demoniacal. He would have such a sweet revenge now. But as he pushed through the throng to look at the prisoner a murmur of wonder which had arisen had increased to a hubbub. This was not Kulondeka at all.

It was one of themselves—a native. In the starlight they could see his face. Yet—the horse was that of Kulondeka.

"Who are you?" asked Sikonile, an assegai raised threateningly.

"Pato, son of Teliso, of the Abatembu, under the chief, Umfanta," was the unhesitating answer.

"And Kulondeka's horse? How didst thou come by it?" asked Mafutana.

"Who is Kulondeka?" said the prisoner, wonderingly.

"Answer questions, do not ask them," interposed Sikonile, furiously, giving the prisoner a couple of vicious digs in the thigh with his assegai.

"I found this horse down there," said the latter sullenly, "and it was standing alone, so I took it. If it is a chief's horse—*au!* here it is. I thought it was a white man's."

"Where were you going?" queried Mafutana.

But before any answer could be made, an interruption occurred. One of the bystanders, who had been bending down closely scrutinizing the prisoner's face

in the starlight, shot upward with a quick ejaculation.

"*Whau!*" he cried, bringing his hand to his mouth. "See, brothers. Here is Pato, son of Teliso, of the Abatembu, under the chief, Umfanta. Should it not rather be Mantisa, son of no Fengu dog in particular, a spy of the *Amapolise*, under Bokelo? Do I not know him! *Hau!* He it was who got me a long time in prison, for stealing a sheep which I never stole. Ha! Welcome to thee, Mantisa. For thee we have a warm bed, ah-ah!—a bed of fire!"

The unfortunate detective, seeing himself unmasked, realized that the only hope of escape for him was a swift death instead of a long and lingering one by fiery torment. So, instead of answering, he only spat contemptuously. A score of assegais were raised. But Sikonile flung himself in the way.

"See you these?" he said. "Where is Kulondeka?"

"That I know not," came the sullen reply.

"Ha! The fire! The fire will make him speak!" cried several. "To the fire then! To the 'Place of the Bones'!"

And in a moment the wretched Fingo's arms were tightly bound behind him with raw-hide, and he himself was hustled along, propelled by kicks and blows and assegai prods, towards the place of his ghastly death.

But not until they had got some little way did it become known to the whole party that the horse had disappeared. It had been left standing, just as it had arisen from the ground, with the bridle still on its neck. In the prevailing excitement no one had made it his business to hold it. Now it was gone.

CHAPTER XXX

THE "PLACE OF THE BONES"

HARLEY GREENOAK for once in his life had committed an error of judgment. He had quite reckoned on the possibility of being followed, even as he knew that every step of his way had been dogged from the moment he had left the settlement. But the possibility of a formidable and cleverly devised ambush being prepared for him in front, he had somehow or other quite overlooked. So when he turned over his horse to Mantisa with instructions to take it to a point agreed upon and await him there, he was, of course, in complete ignorance of the trap into which his auxiliary was about to fall. Even then, if Mantisa had carried out his instructions to the letter, instead of taking a way of his own because it was a little shorter, he need not have fallen into the trap at all.

Greenoak's object in getting rid of his horse for a time was that he was going into exceedingly broken and rugged country, in parts of which he could not ride at all. A led horse would be a serious impediment, hampering him at every step, to say nothing of

the repeated plungings and stumblings of the animal among the rocks and stones being nearly as good as a bugle for all purposes of telling undesirable ears near and far that he was there. Again, it might neigh on occasion, which would serve the same purpose.

Now he struck off at a tangent from his former line of route, and, after some hours of steady walking, got among the broken precipitous ground which overhung the river. Rising from far beneath, he could hear its swirl and murmur. Further down he struck, his labours doubled by his carefulness to avoid any and every sound. For sound travels far on a still night, more especially on a river bank.

He looked about for a place wherein to ensconce himself so that he could see without being seen, and soon found one that answered the purpose so exactly that it might have been made to order. It was a depression overhung by a great rock, and, lying snugly, with his gaze just over the tip of a hollow, he could command a full view of the river drift, while himself invisible from above.

And now it was as well he had had that long sleep in Matanzima's hut, for the very restfulness of this place after hours of hard walking rendered even his iron frame lax to the point of drowsiness. But it was not far to dawn now.

The stillness was absolute, hardly the cry of bird or beast awoke to break it. The loom of the Kei hills

was well-nigh invisible against the stars, so dark had become this darkest hour before the dawn. Then to Harley Greenoak's ears came a far-away sound, faint but unmistakable. It was the sound of voices, of native voices, singing. From far down on the plains beyond the river it came, and it was drawing nearer and nearer.

The watcher's nerves thrilled to the sound. The voices were pitched low; purposely so he knew, none better. Knew also that they proceeded from a moving mass of men. Would the dawn never come?

It would, and it did. The world had grown perceptibly lighter. The loom of the hills was now distinct, but the depth of the plain was in darkness. Still the moving sound drew nearer, and now in the tense stillness the listener could even distinguish the tenour of the words. It was a song of war.

None but a large and strongly armed band would have ventured thus to advertise its presence. The inference was clear. The body now marching from the Gcaleka country was the expected incursion. If he had been in any doubt before, Harley Greenoak had now already decided to himself that his information was accurate.

The darkness faded still more, and now upon the fast lightening plain he was able to make out the moving mass. Lighter still! Hundreds of armed savages were advancing to the drift. He could make

out detail, and took in the fact that many of them had guns, and now even that indescribable rattle of assegai hafts—curiously unlike any other sound—was borne upward to his ears. But the identity of any in the band he could not arrive at.

The war-song had ceased. They descended to the drift in silence, and without a moment's hesitation waded into the swirling current, their weapons held high above their heads. This was breast deep, and as they gained the middle of the stream many linked hands in order to steady themselves against its strength. More than once a deep-toned, smothered laugh and a splash told that an odd warrior here and there had slipped and got a ducking. Finally, the last had disappeared. He could not see them land, his own side of the river being shut from view by the tree-tops; but he knew exactly where they would land, and the line they would take for Matanzima's kraal. Harley Greenoak's work here was done.

The next phase of it was that of warning. Listening intently, he left his hiding-place. There was no sound of life along the river bank, the invading party had gone in an almost contrary direction. He struck into an old path, which followed the downward course of the river, and for some distance was able to travel with ease and rapidity. Then this ceased, giving way to tumbled and broken rocks, every here and there heavily overgrown with trailers. Above, on one side

great rugged krantzes walled him in. Not for many miles further down could he strike the open country again. Greenoak had never been along this river bank before, but his experienced eyes took in the hang of it completely.

Suddenly he stopped dead short, listening intently. In front—and not very far in front—the sound of deep-toned voices. In a moment he had slipped into a cleft between two rocks, and had drawn the trailers over him; and it seemed hardly a moment more when a number of fully armed Kafirs appeared, moving leisurely along the way he had come, but taking the upward course of the bank. But for their utter unguardedness, they would have met him face to face. As it was, they passed so near as almost to brush the trailers which afforded him such precarious concealment. He held his very breath, so near were they.

They were talking at random, and a good deal all at once—and something was said about a roast, and how good it was, and the speakers passed on while others succeeded, talking about nothing in particular. But Harley Greenoak, through the interstices, recognized several of them, among others, Mafutana and Sikonile, whose son he had shot. Then he knew that this hiding-place had received him not a moment too soon.

The last of the Kafirs had gone by, but Greenoak

was in no hurry to move. When, finally, he decided that it was time to do so, the sun was already flaming up from beyond the Kei hills, and the birds were breaking into song, twittering and calling from the cool shade of krantzes, or balancing on twig and spray, joyous, perky, in the glow of the new-born day.

Suddenly he halted. No sight, no sound, had thus pulled him up, but—an odour. For there came to his nostrils a strong smell as of cooking, and it came from in front. He remembered how some of the Kafirs had been talking about a "roast." Of course, he was coming to where they had spent the night, and had feasted—probably upon stolen stock. Well, he would investigate. But—what if there should be others there?

Cautiously he advanced, weapons ready, peering before him, listening, the strange odour stronger with every step, and he found himself hoping they might have left some of their repast, for he could do with a broil himself. And then——

Not altogether unfamiliar with scenes of horrific ghastliness himself, at what he now saw, peering cautiously over a great rock, Harley Greenoak felt his blood run cold and his flesh creep.

Beneath lay a hollow, overhung by the beetling cliff. The place was evidently the resort of a gang of cattle stealers, for the ground was thickly strewn with the skulls and bones of cattle and sheep, but, needless to

say, the sight of these was not what had perturbed him.

In the centre of the place, slung to a thick, stout pole whose ends rested on two rocks, was a human figure—what was left of one, that is. It hung horizontally, bound to the pole by wrists and ankles, back downwards, forming a bow, and underneath were the still smouldering ashes of a large fire. The head hung down and the wretched creature was quite dead, but the middle of the body, upon which the fire had played, presented a sight that was indescribably horrible.

This, then, was the "roast" to which those human fiends had made allusion, decided Greenoak; but why should the poor wretch have incurred such devilish vengeance, for the body was that of a native, not that of a white man? Mastering his horror and disgust, Greenoak stepped quickly forward to investigate—and then the mystery stood explained. In the agonized, drawn face of the dead man he recognized that of Mantisa, the Police detective.

Like light the truth was borne in upon his brain. He pieced together everything. The presence of Mafutana and Sikonile with the party supplied the link. They had been lying in wait for himself, and in the darkness had pounced upon Mantisa in mistake for himself, nor could it have been long after the former had gone on with the horse. Yet why should they

have brought the poor wretch here to put him to such a ghastly death? An assegai or two would have answered all purposes there on the spot. And then a conviction of the real truth came home to Harley Greenoak. They had tortured their prisoner to force him to reveal his own whereabouts, and Mantisa had been unable or unwilling to do so. A great wave of pity and admiration swept through Greenoak's heart as he gazed upon the miserable mangled remains.

"Poor, plucky devil!" he said to himself as he turned away, for the nature of the ground precluded any kind of attempt at burial. "Poor, plucky, heroic devil! Well, he's gone aloft, that's certain, if any one ever did get there, black or white."

As he left the place of horror, he wondered what had become of his horse. Had it been captured too? But as against this, he recalled the fact that it was not in the possession of the perpetrators of this atrocity what time they passed his hiding-place. Well, he supposed he must give it up as lost, but coming at this juncture the loss was serious, for he had intended making a quick round in order to warn as many of the settlers as he could reach.

An hour of further travelling and the bush line would draw to an end in favour of more open country above. Just before reaching this, however, a sound reached him. It was the quick whinny of a horse, the shaking of the saddle-flaps, then a neigh. Of course,

to one of Greenoak's rapid powers of deduction this meant a riderless horse. What if it was his—what if it had broken away, while the savages were occupied with their prisoner? A few more minutes and he came in sight of the animal, and—it *was* his.

But, holding the end of the bridle-rein, was a man, a native—a thick-set, ugly, scrabbly bearded savage, and armed. Greenoak's gun was up in a moment, covering the fellow.

But somehow or other, it did not seem to produce the effect he had expected. The ugly face split into a white stripe of grin, and a voice said in excellent English—

"Not shoot, Mr. Greenoak. I John Voss."

Well might Greenoak start. This, then, was the fellow who had been stealthily following him. The make-up was perfect. It happened that normally John Voss was a singularly neat and smart-looking native, with an intelligent face and, for a native, a very respectable beard, of which he was not a little proud. The sacrifice of this latter alone, in order to transform himself into an evil-looking, squalid savage, argued a whole-hearted zeal deserving of recognition, and he had certainly succeeded, for himself, to a dangerous degree at that moment.

"Well, John, you've had a narrow escape," said Greenoak. "But that I was afraid the horse would have schreked at the shot and cleared, you'd have been

down with a bullet through you at this moment, I believe. Now let's hear all about it."

The other told him—how he had followed Mantisa, and witnessed his capture; how in the excitement of that event he had mingled with the Kafirs in the darkness, and had ridden away upon the horse when their attention was more fully occupied, intending to wait for its owner at the point where he judged the latter would reappear. Then Greenoak told him of the crossing from Gcalekaland, and the barbarous vengeance which had been taken upon poor Mantisa. It happened that John Voss had not been into the location at all, so had been powerless to warn either of the ambush laid, for the simple reason that he knew nothing of it.

And as they travelled, these two laid their plans as to how best warn the neighbourhood.

CHAPTER XXXI

CONDITIONAL

"ANOTHER 'whited sepulchre,' Faugh!" said Hazel, dropping in disgust the two halves of the outwardly magnificent peach she had just broken open, but which within was a mass of squirming maggots.

"Try these," said Dick Selmes, pulling down a bough of the tree, on which grew several, and holding it for her while she made a selection.

"I thought so," she went on, rapidly breaking open and throwing away another, and then another. "No, I give it up. This is a bad year for peaches."

The two were alone together among the fragrant boskiness of the fruit-laden garden. The midsummer day was hot and cloudless, yet just a puff of cool air every now and then, from the not very far distant Indian Ocean, redeemed it from downright sultriness. Birds piped and whistled away up among the leaves, but shy of showing themselves over much. There had been too much havoc wrought among their kind in defence of the fruit to encourage them to court human propinquity.

"How jolly this is!" went on Dick, looking around.

"Are you ever anything but jolly?" she asked.

"Oh yes! I can get the blues, I can tell you. For instance——"

"For instance—when?" she repeated, as he broke off.

"For instance—well, I don't mind saying it. That time we left Haakdoornfontein I felt anything but jolly."

"Yet Haakdoorn isn't a wildly exciting place at the best of times. Ah, I see. You missed the hunting."

This was exasperating. She was in a bright, mischievous, teasing mood, but oh—how entrancing she looked, the lift of the heavily lashed eyelid, the little flash of white teeth in the bantering smile, the rich mantling of the sun-kissed, oval face.

"I missed *you*. Hazel, you know that perfectly well. And just think. I had you all to myself in those days, and here not. All these jokers who were here for Christmas—well, I found them a bore, for that reason."

Christmas had just past, and on and around it several people from far and near had been to spend it with the Waybridges; and of these visitors the bulk had been men—and in proportion had seemed fully to appreciate Hazel's attractions. Dick Selmes could not but own to himself that he had not enjoyed his

Christmas over much, though he would not have let it be known for worlds.

"Hadn't you enough of me all to yourself at Haakdoorn?" she said softly, but still with that mischievous sparkle in her eyes.

"As if that question requires any answer. Darling, you know I want you all to myself always—all through our lives. You must have seen it. Haven't you?"

"Perhaps. I won't tease you any more now. But you must listen to me." The girl had grown very grave now — very earnest. Her eyes, dilated with varying emotions, were full upon his face, and the predominant emotion, was unqualified approval. "First of all, what would your father have to say?"

"The dad? Why, he'd be delighted, of course."

"Yes, but would he? I'm not so sure. He has never heard of my existence, and would think you had been entrapped by some nobody in the course of your travels——" Here a slight wave of colour had come over her face. "Now, I won't have that thought of me, or said by any one."

"But, Hazel darling," he pleaded eagerly, "I think you are setting up a kind of—er—bogey. The old dad is the dearest old chap in the world, and a jolly sight too good to me, and for me."

She looked at him and softened. She liked him more—more than ever—for what he had just said. Perhaps she showed it.

"I can quite believe that," she answered. "Still, it doesn't alter what I say."

His face fell. So blank was it that for a moment he felt positively miserable.

"But, Hazel dearest, don't you care for me a little bit?"

Her heart went out to him.

"Dick, you know I am very fond of you," she answered, adding to herself, "as who could help being?"—"No—no, not yet," putting out a hand as he made a step forward.

"But—now we are engaged," he protested rapturously.

"We are not," she answered, and his face fell again. "And the only condition on which we will be is the one I told you. Get your father's consent."

"It strikes me, Hazel, that you are forgetting I am not exactly under age. I am quite independent into the bargain."

"All the more reason why I should refuse to be the means of bringing dissension between you. Why, it would be murderous—absolutely murderous, after what you have told me. I am not forgetting either that you have a certain position."

"Oh, hang the 'position'!" cried Dick. "But you are very cool and—er—judicial over it all, Hazel. If you cared as much as I do——"

"Perhaps, dear, I am speaking and acting in your

own interests," answered the girl, softly. "I am setting you a test. It might be that when you get back home again something might transpire which would make you devoutly thankful to me for having refused to allow you to engage yourself to some little nobody whom you had found amusing in the course of your wanderings."

"Hazel! Now you hurt me."

He looked it. There was no doubt about it that his feelings were deeply wounded, but there was a dignity about the way in which he took it that appealed to her so powerfully as well-nigh to bring about her surrender there and then.

"I didn't mean to, God knows," she answered earnestly and more softly still. "But I am looking at things from a sheer common-sense standpoint. You are very brave and strong, Dick, but, in one way, I believe I am stronger than you. I am only putting before you a little trial of strength, of endurance. Surely *you* won't shrink from that?"

"Let us understand each other, Hazel," he said gravely, all his boyish light-heartedness gone. "You won't engage yourself to me until I get my father's consent?"

"That's it."

"But you will, conditionally, on my getting it?"

She thought a minute.

"I will wait until you do get it, or it is refused. But, Dick, understand that this doesn't bind *you* in the slightest degree."

"Oh, but it does bind me. Whoever heard of a one-sided engagement?" some of his light-heartedness returning. "I'll write to the dear old dad on the very first opportunity."

"Wouldn't it be better to go yourself than to write?"

"And leave you all that time? No—no, Hazel. I'm not going to give you that chance of forgetting me."

"Or yourself?" with a significant smile.

"Now you are repeating the offence, and I shan't forgive you unless you give me just one k—— Oh, damn!"

The change of tone, the change of attitude were in keeping, and Dick found himself in a sort of "standing at attention" rigidity, as small Jacky Waybridge came lounging down the garden path, a catapult in his hand. We fear that Dick came near wishing he had left that unwelcome urchin to the sharks on a former occasion, but that in such case he himself would not now be here—with Hazel.

"Been shooting any birds, Jacky?" said Dick. "Look. Just over there I saw a rare clump of mouse-birds light just now; over there, just this side of the mealie land."

The spot indicated would take the small intruder fairly out of sight.

"No good, catapult's broken."

"Why don't you go to the house and get another?"

"They're all broken. Mr. Selmes, couldn't you mend it for me?"

"I'll try. Let's see. Ah, got a bit of *reimpje* about you?"

The youngster felt in his pockets.

"No, I haven't," he said.

"Well, you'd better cut away to the house and get one," said Dick.

There is a modicum of cussedness, sometimes vague, sometimes more pronounced, inherent in most children. This one had his share of it. He was fond of Hazel, and attached to his rescuer, yet there was something about the two which had aroused his infantile curiosity. When he saw them alone together—which he did pretty frequently—a sort of instinct to watch them would come uppermost in his unformed mind, and this was upon him now. So he said—

"Never mind about the catapult, Mr. Selmes. I'm tired. I'll sit and talk to you and Hazel."

"Well, what shall we talk about, Jacky?" said Dick, making a virtue of necessity.

"Oh, let's go on talking about—what you were talking about while I came."

This was funny. The two looked at each other.

"But that wouldn't interest you in the least, Jacky," answered the girl. "In fact, you wouldn't understand it."

The sharp eyes of the youngster were full upon her face, and did not fail to notice that she changed colour slightly. When he himself had done something which he ought not to have done, and was taxed with it, he would change colour too; wherefore now he drew his own deductions. What could Hazel have been doing that came within that category?

"Never mind," he said. "I won't tell. No, I won't."

"Won't tell?" repeated Hazel. "Won't tell what, Jacky?"

"I won't tell," was all they could get out of him. Dick Selmes burst out laughing.

"Before you can 'tell' anything, kid, you must first of all have something to tell," he said. "You've been talking a lot of bosh. Now, I think we'd better go in, for it must be getting on for dinner-time." The two got up, and as they strolled along beneath the high quince hedge, hanging out round fruit, like the balls upon a Christmas tree, both hoped for an opportunity of at any rate satisfactorily closing their conversation. But it was not to be. That little wretch stuck to them like their shadow, nor did either want to inflame his curiosity by telling him positively to clear.

"Then it is to be conditional," Dick said, just before they reached the door.

"That's the word."

"On the terms named?"

"Exactly on the terms named."

"Good. I accept them—except as to the one-sided part of the business."

"That, too, I insist upon," she answered, with a smile and a bright nod, as she left him.

Alone, for a brief space, Dick Selmes went over in his mind the interview, so untowardly and exasperatingly interrupted, and was obliged to admit to himself that his love and admiration for Hazel Brandon were, if possible, deepened and intensified. Her beauty and bright, sweetness of disposition had fascinated and captured him, but now he had awakened to the fact that she possessed a rare depth of character indeed. He knew now that she cared for him—yes, and that very deeply; he had read it in the course of that interview by several unmistakable signs. Yet she had deliberately and of set purpose insisted upon that conditional delay. It showed a worldly wisdom, a knowledge of human nature beyond his own, he was constrained to admit; and in every way it was creditable to her. Of the obstacle he made entirely light, for it was in reality no obstacle at all except for the period of waiting involved.

And over himself some change had come. What

was it? He felt a gravity he had never felt before. The old, thistledown, light-hearted recklessness seemed to have left him. His mind, attuned to a new and set purpose, seemed to have altered, to have solidified. And yet, realizing this development, he rejoiced in it. He would not have foregone it for the world. Henceforward his was a new being.

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CHAPTER XXXII

SIGNS AND OMENS

"WHICH way shall we go?" said Hazel. "Shall we ride over to Komgha?"

"I vote we go bang in the other direction," answered Dick Selmes. "The township's all clatter and dust—and altogether abominable. Mrs. Waybridge was an angel of light when she cropped up and dragged me out of it."

"Yes, you wanted some dragging, didn't you?" was the somewhat mischievous rejoinder.

"As if I knew. Good Lord! what a narrow thing it was. And there I was, cudgelling my muddy brains for some excuse, because I thought you were staying in the town."

The two were on horseback. They had started off for an afternoon ride together, all undecided as to where they should go. But there was one place Dick Selmes was resolved they should not go to—unless Hazel particularly wanted to, and somehow he did not think she would—and that was the township. It was full of his own sex, and he wanted the girl all to himself,

to-day at any rate. He had a lively recollection of the Christmas gathering which he had not enjoyed, for the reason that then he never could get her all to himself. He had voted them a set of unmitigated bores, and, rare thing indeed with him, had become almost irritable. Yet if ever any one was what is known as a "man's man," that was Dick Selmes. Given the absence of Hazel on that festive occasion, he would have voted them all thundering good fellows. But—circumstances alter cases.

Since the understanding of that morning, and the compact entered into between them, a more restful feeling had come over these two; a feeling as though they belonged to each other; and though some patience was needed, at any rate there was an end to uncertainty.

"We might go round by old Umjuza's kraal and Sampson's store," suggested Dick, "unless you would like to look anybody up. There are the Paynes, for instance."

"No; I don't want to see any one. We'll keep to the veldt."

"Them's my sentiments," cried Dick, gaily, emphasizing the said gaiety by a swish of his whip that caused his steed to prance and snort. His wounded arm was quite healed by now. "What a difference there is about the veldt here; no jolly old koorhaans crowing and squawking—or a buck every now and then

jumping up under your feet, not even an odd pair of blue cranes. Only those silly old bromvogels, and they wouldn't be there either, but that even John Kafir won't eat *them*."

A pair of the great black hornbills were strutting among the sparse mimosa on the opposite slope, emitting their deep, booming grunt. But although deficient in game, the veldt was fair and pleasant to the eye, with its roll of sunlit plain and round-topped hills, and if the crowing of koorhaans or the grating cackle of the wild guinea-fowl were wanting, the cooing of doves, and the triple call of the hoepoe from the bush-grown kloofs made soft music on the slumbrous calm.

"You'll never stand English life after this, Dick."

"Oh yes. We can always come out here again for a change. There's more variety of sport in England; in fact, there's something going all the year round. What do you think, dear? The dad talks about putting me up for Parliament soon."

"A very sensible plan too."

"But I can't spout. And I'm pretty certain I'd promise the crowd anything it asked for. Whether it would get it is another thing."

Hazel laughed, but she there and then mentally resolved that Sir Anson's wish should meet with fulfilment—in certain contingencies, that is.

"What a rum thing it is to feel one's self out of

leading-strings again," went on Dick. "But I wonder when old Greenoak will turn up here and give me marching orders, like he did at Haakdorn. I shan't obey this time. Though, I was forgetting, I shall have to give them to myself."

When Harley Greenoak had returned to the Komgha he laughed to himself as he learned what had become of his charge. Twice he had ridden over and spent a day or two with the Waybridges, and from what he had seen there he judged that his responsibility was nearing its end. But the fact of his charge being in such good hands had left him free to follow out the secret investigations and negotiations in which he was then engaged, and the success or failure of which, both chances being about even, would be of momentous import.

Before Hazel could reply there was a rush of dogs, and vast snarling and barking as the brutes leapt at the horses, and one or two, incidentally, at their riders. The latter on topping a rise had come upon a large kraal, whose beehive-shaped huts stood in clusters, adjoining the square, or circular, cattle or goat pens common to each.

In a moment Dick had curled the lash of his rawhide whip round the long, lithe body of a fine, tawny, black-muzzled greyhound, which was savagely leaping at the hind quarters of the steed ridden by Hazel. With a snarling, agonized yelp the beast dropped back howling,

and for a second or two the ardour of the others seemed checked. Then they came on again.

Dick now turned his horse, and charging in among them, cut right and left with his whip. The savage pack, demoralized, retired howling, and by this time the riders were right abreast of the kraal.

The latter seemed now in a ferment. The ochre-smeared figures of women—many of them with a brown human bundle on their backs—stamping mealies in a rough wooden pestle, or smoking and gossiping in groups—now got up, chattering and laughing shrilly; while the male inhabitants of the place—quite a number—came swarming out of the huts, talking volubly in their deep-toned bass, to see what was going on. But no attempt was made to call off the dogs. These, encouraged by the presence of their owners, and an unmistakable sympathy on the part of the latter which their instinct realized, rushed with renewed savagery to the attack.

There were upwards of a score of them; some really fine specimens of the greyhound breed, tawny or white, and large withal; and now it became manifest that the evil, contemptuous barbarians were actually hounding them on. Dick's whip seemed to have lost its effect among the snapping, frantic pack, and when one brute fastened its teeth in the tendon of the hind leg of Hazel's steed, Dick Selmes judged it time to draw his revolver.

The effect upon the dark, jeering crowd was electric. A fierce, deep, chest-note, akin to a menacing roar, took the place of the derisive laughter with which the barbarians had been enjoying the fun. Quick as animals most of them had dived into the huts. In a trice they reappeared, and there was the glint and bristle of assegais. Truly it was a formidable-looking mob, that which confronted these two, taking a peaceful afternoon ride.

The worst of it was the latter were unable to talk the Xosa tongue. Hazel, though Colonial born, had no knowledge of it; first, because in the Cape Colony it is rather the exception than the rule to use anything but the—now world-famed—*taal* in intercourse with natives; secondly, because in her part of the country there were hardly any Kafirs at all, Dick Selmes because he had never even begun to learn it.

"Try them in Dutch, Hazel," said the latter, quickly. "Tell them if they don't call the dogs off sharp I'll shoot the best. Then I'll begin to shoot *them*. First shot I fire, you start off home at full gallop, and never mind about me."

She obeyed. At the sound of her voice there was a momentary lull, then the jeers blared out afresh. Dick Selmes felt his blood fairly boil as he realized that they were actually mimicking her. Then as the dogs made another rush, he dropped the muzzle of his revolver and shot the foremost, fair and square through

the shoulders. The beast uttered a feeble yap and rolled over kicking. The rest hung back.

But its owner, a hulking, ochre-smeared savage, emitted a howl and rushed forth from the crowd, a long tapering assegai in his hand poised for a throw. Dick's revolver covered him in a moment. The Kafir, for all his blind rage, realized that it was pointed straight. He had seen what execution its wielder could do, wherefore he pulled up sharp. Kafirs are sworn dog fanciers, and not infrequently have more affection for their dogs than their children; but this particular one had still more affection for his life, wherefore he halted. Then both knew that the situation was saved.

Slowly, warily, they rode on—on, not back; for Dick bore well in mind Harley Greenoak's precept, never to let savages think you are afraid of them; the Kafirs hurling after them all manner of jeering abuse, which it was quite as well that Hazel, at any rate, did not understand.

"We are well out of that," said Dick, reloading the discharged chamber from some extra cartridges loose in his pocket. "The infernal scoundrels! Hazel, darling, I'm afraid I have let you in for a considerable scare."

"I wasn't scared to speak of. Dear, but you did bring it off well. I shall—should—always feel so safe with you."

"'Shall—should'?" he repeated, looking at her. "No, there's no occasion to correct the grammar. Let it stand as at first."

The girl made no reply, but her face, half turned away from him, was wondrously soft. Yes, indeed—that which she had found wanting in him was abundantly supplied now, she was thinking. She almost felt compunction for the conditions she had imposed upon him that morning—and yet—and yet—was it not sound sense, after all? But what if it should fail—would she still have it in her to stand firm? Well, of that she did not care to think—as yet.

"We are nearly at Sampson's store now," said Dick, when they had gone a couple of miles further. "Shall we go on and have a yarn with the old chap, or take a round and get home, for it's just as well not to pass that hospitable hornets' nest again?"

"Just as you like," she answered, then added: "Let's go right on, and have a chat with old Sampson. It's early yet. What's this?"

A body of Kafirs appeared in sight, coming down the road towards them. They seemed about thirty in number, and the glint of assegais was plain, even from these. Now, Kafirs were not wont to patrol the roads in armed bodies. They travelled normally in twos and threes, carrying the usual kerries. Yet these were many and armed.

Dick Selmes was conscious of a tightening of the

heart. What did it mean, at that time of day, when the atmosphere was rife with disquieting reports?

"We must go through them," he said. "There's no other course short of turning and running away. And that wouldn't do, you know."

"Of course not," said Hazel, who was really feeling very anxious. "I declare by now I hate the sight of these horrible wretches. I never want to set eyes on one again."

"Well, you won't in England," said Dick, slily. "There are none there, you know."

They were in among the group now, which parted to make way for them. Two or three gave them the good day, but it was in a derisive way, and asked for tobacco. Dick shook his head to signify that he had none, for he did not choose to stop in the middle of that wild-looking crowd, after recent experience. The savages leered at Hazel with bold stare, and muttered to each other. Again it was as well that neither of the two understood a word of what they said.

"What on earth have they got all those ox-tails for, I wonder?" she remarked, when they were through. For each had been the bearer of several severed tails, with the hide on, raw and red.

"Probably to make soup with," laughed Dick. "Contact with civilization must have taught them the luxury of the kitchen as well as that of the cellar. There's the store."

As they drew near the long, low, brick building, roofed with corrugated iron, the storekeeper came out. He was a tall, elderly man, with a grizzled beard. Dick had met him before.

"Why, it's Mr. Selmes," he said, putting out a hand. "How' do. How' do, Miss." Then again to Dick, "Where's Greenoak?"

"Oh, he's away on some mysterious errand of his own."

"I'm afraid he'll go on one o' them once too often. I'm afraid I'm in a poor way to entertain ladies, but I've got the coffee kettle on, but only tinned milk."

Hazel declared she wanted nothing better, and Sampson, disappearing inside, fished out a ricketty chair.

"You'll be better here nor in there," he said. "Kafirs and raw hides, and so on, don't make the inside of a shanty pleasant."

As he went in again Dick followed him.

"What's your idea as to the state of things, Sampson?" he said.

"My idea? There'll be hell let loose, d'rectly. Nothing'll stop it. You'd better warn Waybridge, from me, to trek."

"No!"

"Yes. See. None of 'em come round trading now; no, not even for drinks. Just now, though, I had a robustious mob of Sandili's Gaikas round here

buying ox-tails. There's been a trade in them lately."

"What do they want them for, eh? Ox-tail soup?"

The other looked at him pityingly—then emitted a dry guffaw.

"Soup? War fal-lals, that's what they're for. And there are other signs."

"Now I come to think of it, I've seen them before, in the Transkei."

"Yes. You did service there with the Police, I'm told. Well, we don't want to scare the young lady, but you tip the office from me to Waybridge to clear. There'll be hell in a week or two at the outside."

"I'll tell him. But are you going to remain on here?"

"I dare say. They won't hurt me. It wouldn't pay them for one thing. Have a drop of grog?"

"Thanks."

The storekeeper fished out a bottle of Boer brandy —of antipodal quality, of course, to that which he retailed in the native trade—and then they went outside and rejoined Hazel. She, drinking her coffee, narrated their experience at the wayside kraal.

"That's Ngombayi's crowd," pronounced Sampson, "and they're a bad lot. They're a bit disturbed now, but they'll quiet down in a week or two."

Dick Selmes, contrasting this cool utterance with the prediction he had just heard, felt amused, but did not show it. Then, after a little more chat, they took their leave, returning by a devious route, so as to avoid the objectionable kraal.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE GENERALSHIP OF ELSIE MCGUNN

It was evening, but Waybridge had not returned. He had started early that morning for Fort Isiwa, to deliver a lot of slaughter oxen for commissariat purposes, for which he had received a very good price indeed. He had been selling off as much of his stock as he could, for although he did not believe the scare would come to anything, still it was as well to be prepared for the worst, and money in the bank was better than stock herded from a laager, with all the contingent risks. So he had set forth in high spirits.

His wife was in no way anxious. There was nothing of the "unprotected female" about her. If put to it she could level a barrel and reload as quickly and as calmly as one of the opposite sex; besides, there was Dick Selmes, who had already proved his grit. He, when he had suggested moving on, had met with such a whole-souled negative, as to set at rest any doubts that might have been lingering in his mind as to outstaying his welcome.

"Why, Mr. Selmes, you'd never desert us unprotected females," she had said. "John has to be away a bit, on and off, just now. And now you want to run away and leave us all alone."

"Eh, that I'm sure he wadna be doing," had struck in Elsie McGunn—who was clearing the table—with her usual lack of ceremony.

Dick roared. He wanted some outlet for the intense relief that this cordial welcome conveyed. It was like a reprieve. He would not have to leave Hazel yet. She was his, and now he could stay and take care of her.

"Why, Elsie, you're a host in yourself," he said. "A mere man, more or less, doesn't count when you're on hand."

The Scotswoman, who was brawny and muscular, accepted the compliment; moreover, she and Dick were great friends. He delighted to chaff her, but by no means always got the best of the encounter.

"Ay. A'd tak ony sax o' yon heathen sauvages and mak 'em wish they'd never been born," she returned complacently. "Still, it's weel to have a mon on the place, speeshully sic a mon as yeerself, Mr. Selmes."

"Thanks, Elsie," said Dick, with another laugh, appreciating the sly chaff. "It's a comfort to know that my trumpeter isn't dead, anyhow."

It was evening, and the usual rush of myriad stars

flashed and twinkled in the warm velvety sky. The moon had not yet risen. Dick Selmes and Hazel were strolling about round the house. It was much better in the open air, they mutually agreed, and they were alone together. Their hostess was engaged in the putting to bed of her nursery of two.

"What nights these are," Dick was saying, the glow of his pipe making a red spot in the darkness. "Now, at good old Hesketh's it was always jolly shivery after dark. But here—ah, it's like a dream."

"I don't know. I feel unaccountably depressed to-night," replied the girl, with a little shiver. Dick noticed it.

"Darling, let me go in and get you a wrap," he said eagerly. "You're chilly."

"No. I don't want a wrap. I don't know what it is, but I feel a sort of presentiment, as if something was going to happen. I've been feeling it all the afternoon, but I wouldn't say anything about it for fear of communicating it to Mrs. Waybridge and making you laugh at me."

"As if I should ever do that. Now chuck off this presentiment, my Hazel. Why, yesterday afternoon you were saying you would always feel so safe with me —with me," he added tenderly. "That was one of the sweetest things I've ever heard you say."

"Was it? Well, then, Dick, it's true. Oh, there

are those horrid cattle groaning again. Will they never leave off?"

"But they often do it. If I were to drive them away they'd be back again in a minute or two. What does it matter? It pleases them and doesn't hurt us."

"It's eerie, all the same," she said, with another shiver.

The point of which remark was that the cattle, turned out at night to graze around the homestead, had collected at a place down by the kraals, where sheep were slaughtered, and with their noses to the ground, were emitting a series of groaning noises, culminating in a sort of shrill bellow. Then they would scurry away for a few yards, and returning to the blood-saturated spot, would repeat the performance again and again. After all, it was not an unusual one. On moonlight nights, especially, would it be enacted. To-night, however, in the darkness, the effect was particularly weird and dismal.

"Talking of old Hesketh," went on Dick, bent on taking her mind off dismal fancyings, "I wonder how the fine old chap will cotton to me as a nephew, eh?"

"Now, Dick, you're getting 'too previous,'" she answered, with a laugh. "Why, what can that be?"

A glow was suffusing the far sky, growing brighter

and brighter. It seemed to be in the direction of their ride of the day before.

"Moon rising, I suppose," said Dick, re-lighting his pipe.

"No. It's not quite in the right place for that. Look. There's another."

At an interval of space to the left, another similar glow appeared. A very ugly and uncomfortable inspiration now took hold of Dick Selmes' mind, but he was not going to share it with his companion.

"Grass fires," he said. "That's what it will be. And now, Hazel dear, although it's a vast bit of self-denial to me, I believe we'd better go in. I've a very strong suspicion you've caught cold. What'll Elsie say? That it was my fault, of course. She herds you, if anything, rather closer than Greenoak tries to herd me."

"Yes. We are both in leading-strings," laughed Hazel. "But it's a good thing I brought her up here, and made her stay, or they'd have been all sixes and sevens. She's as good as any half-dozen of these lazy, dirty Kafir or Fingo girls, and now they can't even get them."

Mrs. Waybridge had returned to the sitting-room and was awaiting them.

"Why, Hazel dear, you look quite white and shivery," she said. "You've been catching cold; yet, it's a warm evening."

"I believe she has, Mrs. Waybridge," said Dick. "I should give her something hot, and turn her straight in."

Hazel smiled to herself at the airs of proprietorship he was beginning to assume. But it was with a very affectionate pressure of the hand that she bade him good night.

Dick Selmes, left to himself, wandered out on to the stoep again, and then, as if this did not leave him enough room to stretch his legs, wandered out on to the grass below. He lit another pipe, and, his heart all warm with thoughts of love and youth, proceeded to pace up and down. His own company was congenial to him then. There was so much to let his mind dwell upon, to go back to—and, better still, to look forward to. So that it was not surprising that a full hour should have gone by like a mere flash. Awaking from his reverie, he looked up and around. The double glow which he and Hazel had noticed in the distance had died down. But further round, and nearer now, two more of a similar appearance were reddening the sky. What did it mean? His first uncomfortable suspicions had been lulled, then forgotten. But now? Grass fires were not wont to spring up from all points of the compass. Dick Selmes stood still, staring at the distant redness. The sky was becoming lighter now, but in a more gradual, more golden hue, precursor of the rising moon.

Then he became aware of a movement of the front door, which he had left half open. Some one was standing there, clad in light garments, and beckoning to him. He recognized the stalwart figure of Elsie McGunn.

"Ye'll be better inside, laddie," she whispered, flinging ceremony to the winds in the importance of the moment. "A'm thinking there's that going forward we'll be nae best pleased to see."

Dick sprang up the steps in a second.

"What's the row, Elsie?" he said.

"Hoot, mon, dinna speak that loud. A' hadn't done washing up in the kitchen, and when A' turrned there was a black heathen sauvage a-speerin' in at the window under the blind."

"We'll soon settle him," said Dick, making a move to start upon that errand. But a strong—a very strong—detaining hand was upon his arm.

"Ye'll not leave the inside o' this hoose. Come in, laddie, and look for yeerself. It's from inside ye're going to tak care o' Miss Hazel, not from without, all stickit with the murdering spears of black sauvages."

She drew him inside by main force, and noiselessly closed the door, turning the key in the lock.

"Get ye the guns now," she said. "It's at the back they'll be wanted."

In this brief but very stirring experience, Dick

Selmes had learned the value of promptitude. In a minute he had joined Elsie in the kitchen. He was loaded with a double shot-gun, and combined rifle and smoothbore, and a revolver. Going into an adjacent room where there was no light, he lifted a corner of the blind and peered forth.

The moon had not quite risen, but it was light enough to see that in the open space between the house and the quince hedge which railed off the garden, several dark forms were standing. They were some fifty yards off, and seemed to be making signs to others behind, probably hidden in the deep shade of the hedge. It was also light enough to make out that, tied round leg and arm, they wore tufts of cow-hair, and once the peculiar rattle of assegai hafts, hardly audible, vibrated to the horrified gazer's listening ear.

All the blood seemed to curdle back to Dick Selmes' heart. The warning words of the store-keeper seemed to burn in letters of fire into his brain. "There'll be hell let loose directly," Sampson had said. And now Hazel was at the mercy—or would be—of these savage fiends, for what could be done for long against the weight of numbers? He was back in the kitchen. One solitary candle was burning dimly.

"Can you shoot, Elsie?" he whispered hurriedly, making as if to hand her the shot-gun,

which was loaded with Treble A. buckshot cartridges.

"Na, lad. A' can do better nor that. Do you do the shutin'."

She was rolling up her sleeves to the shoulders, displaying a pair of arms that would have been useful to a navvy or a drayman. At her feet lay a long-handled axe, rusty and blunt. This she now picked up, swinging it a couple of times aloft, but with the thick side of the head, not the edge, turned outwards.

"Yon'll nae be movin' as long as there's a light," she said. "They'll be waiting until we're in bed, as they'll think, puir feckless loons. We'll put it out the noo."

Dick was moved to intense admiration for the cool intrepidity of the woman; at the art of generalship she displayed. Here, surely, was the true fighting blood of some old Highland or Border clan. Even he seemed to be taking a back seat. She put out the candle.

"Dinna shute till A' give ye the wurrd," she whispered.

The back door was in two parts. The upper one of these Elsie now noiselessly set a little open, so as to convey the idea that in a happy-go-lucky, careless, all-secure feeling, it had not been thought necessary to shut it. Then she stood back from

the doorway, of course in black darkness, the axe, poised on high, held ready; its weight no more tax on her brawny arms than if it had been a quince switch.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MRS. WAYBRIDGE HAS AN IDEA

Dick Selmes, who had intuitively grasped the simplicity of the tactics to be observed, was at the back of the room; not quite opposite the doorway, lest the light from without should fall upon him. The minutes of waiting were tense beyond the critical moment of any adventure which had come his way yet. And it was a time of waiting. The savages would allow time, after the removal of the light, for the occupants to retire. It would be so much easier to wreak their deed of red murder upon the slumbering and unsuspecting, and this he realized. But his pulses were throbbing, and it seemed that his own heart-beats must be audible to those outside. Then he pulled himself together. A grim, satirical impulse to laughter was upon him as he thought what a deadly surprise was in store for them, and cautiously he fingered the ammunition in his pockets so as to guard against the possibility of losing precious time in trying to jam the wrong cartridges into the wrong gun. Ha! Now for it!

For the upper half of the door was slowly opening. A dark head and shoulders were framed within the square of comparative light from outside, then the watcher could make out that their owner was bending over to try and undo the inner fastenings of the lower half of the door. The head was well within the room; why didn't the axe descend upon it? But Elsie McGunn had laid her plans deeper than that.

The Kafir turned, and seemed to be signalling back to his fellows; then giving his attention to his own work, he straddled the lower half of the door and was within the room. But before he had time even to stand upright he fell like a log. For the axe-head had descended, catching him with a horrid crunch just where the skull joined on to the back of the neck. Not a groan, not a struggle. The chief, Sandili, had lost one fighting man, and that at the hand of a woman.

Silence again. Now another dark form filled the square, and the same inward move began, only the newcomer did not imitate his predecessor in striving to undo any fastenings. He was a gigantic, grease-smeared beast, and Dick Selmes could make out a glint of moonlight upon white eyeball, and a glisten on assegai blades, held in the dark cruel hand, as he made the effort of clambering over. Then the downward sweep, and crunch of the weighty iron, and this

one sank as silently as the first. The chief, Sandili, had lost two fighting men, and that at the hand of a woman.

Heavens! could this go on for ever? thought the entranced spectator, standing back in the black gloom, awaiting his turn. Surely those outside would become suspicious—in popular parlance, would "smell a rat." But he forgot that the essence of their plan was to effect an entrance one by one and in silence, and to that end they would wait until each was safely inside, and, so as not to press or hurry the foregoing one, would not wait immediately against the door. So, in a trice, a third appeared, and met with exactly the same fate. Sandili, the chief, had lost three fighting men, and still at the hand of a woman.

The extraordinary dexterity and noiselessness with which each savage had been felled, had awakened no sort of suspicion among those without. But with the arrival of the fourth within the room, Elsie had somehow miscalculated by ever so little, and instead of laying this one out, rigid and motionless, the heavy iron head of the axe had descended full upon the skull instead of upon the lower base thereof; consequently, although the Kafir went down like a felled ox, the stroke was not sufficiently vital in its effect as to prevent him from emitting a groan, such as will sometimes proceed from a felled ox lying prone

beneath the hammer. And it carried to the ears of those outside.

These were seen to start and stand stock still, as though listening intently. Then massing together, they came straight for the door, at a sort of stealthy, creeping run.

"Shute, lad! Shute now!" whispered Elsie, quickly. Dick advanced a step or two, just keeping still out of sight. A sharp, detonating roar, and the heavy charge of Treble A. raked the bunched-up mass. Another roar, and the effect was terrific, indescribable. The ground was covered with dark, struggling forms, others staggering and tumbling over these. At such close quarters the execution done had been deadly, awful. The night air was rent with screams and yells. Some, leaping up, fell immediately, even before they could carry out their intention of limping away. Others lay still, as if never to move again. It seemed that there was hardly one untouched among that stricken heap.

But there was, and although the move escaped Dick, a rapid signal was given. Then from the further shade there rushed forth a number of dark forms, and in open line—for they had taken in the lesson and avoided massing—these spread out, so as to surround the house. But Dick Selmes had reloaded in a second, and now, quick to take in a favourable moment, he raked the line at such a point that three

or four dropped beneath the deadly buckshot. And now the night air rang with demoniacal yells. The vengeful savages, drunk with fury, sprang round to the front of the house and swarmed up the steps of the stoep.

"Go ye round to the front," said Elsie. "A'll keep 'em out of here."

She had swung up her axe again. Dick, in a second, had gained the front. The house, situated on a slope, was considerably higher than the level of the ground on this side, and there were no end windows. There were, however, two commanding the stoep, one on either side of the front door. It took hardly a moment to throw open one of these, and not another to rake the mass of Kafirs pouring up the steps, with a charge of the deadly buckshot. Yelling, struggling, such as could move, that is, they would have fallen back, but those behind prevented this. Again the other barrel spoke, this time with the same effect. Thoroughly demoralized now, those who could do so glided away, and sought the nearest cover. And then upon Dick's ears came a loud cry of alarm, and it came from Hazel's room.

This was at the end of the house, projecting beyond the stoep, the window looking out in front. With a bound he had gained the door, and burst it open.

Hazel was standing back in a corner of the room,

transfixed with terror. As a matter of fact, she had summoned up rare courage in deciding to remain quietly where she was instead of rushing out, and so, seriously to hamper and embarrass the defenders, as her natural impulse would have been. What Dick now saw was a big Kafir worming himself through the window, half in, half out. But, quick as thought, somebody pushed past him, and in the now flooding moonlight he saw the lift of the Scotswoman's brawny arms, and, with a crunching thud, down came the axe-head on the skull of the venturesome savage, with the same result as before.

"You've left your side, Elsie," he said.

"Go ye back to it," was the answer. "A'm staying here."

There was a crisp, uncompromising decisiveness about this statement that Dick well knew there would be no disputing. So he obeyed. Now, through the upper half of the door, the quince hedge was visible in the moonlight, and so, apparently, was he, for now a roar of firearms broke forth from that cover, and a shower of bullets and pot-legs came rattling against the walls of the house; one indeed inside, not far, he could have sworn, from his ear.

The moon, though far from at full, threw upon the house a great deal too much light, and, on the other hand, not enough to dispel the shade of the quince

hedge. To this extent the enemy had the advantage, and the flash and roar, and the vicious spit of missile on wall or roof—or a humming whistle above either, as it hurtled away harmlessly into space—was continuous. Kafirs, as a rule, are execrable shots, though here and there a rare exception is to be found. Such a rare exception now Dick Selmes began to fear was present among this crowd, for every now and then a single bullet would hum through the upper half of the door, always striking in the same place, and always when he, judging position from some recent discharge, had returned the fire, using the rifle this time.

But now that he had to play a waiting game, his blood cooled. The nights were short at this time of year. With the first light of morning their weakness would become apparent. The Kafirs would find some means of rushing them. It was clear that Thompson's prediction had been verified. This was no sporadic outbreak of irresponsible savagery. The whole Gaika location was up in arms, and the glow succeeding glow which he and Hazel had seen earlier in the evening, was that of flaming homesteads, deserted or the reverse, which the barbarians had fired to signal their rising. As for relief from without, why, it was probable that Komgha itself was threatened, or if not, to send forth a small force among thousands of savages pillaging and burning would be madness, whereas to send out a large

one would be to expose the settlement itself to attack and massacre. Things looked dark enough, anyway, and now the first heat and excitement of actual and active fight over, a reaction of foreboding set in upon him. A soft rustle of garments beside him in the darkness made him start.

"Mr. Selmes. I have a plan. It might be worth trying."

"Good God, Mrs. Waybridge, go out of here! There's one beast who can shoot, and you're bang in the line of fire. Ah!"

With the very words a missile came humming between the two, splashing itself into the wall. Dick pulled her suddenly and forcibly out of the line of the open half-door.

"This is it," she said, as coolly as though nothing had happened. "The rockets. Why not do something with the rockets?"

"The rockets! Ah!"

The words escaped him with a gasp, and the explanation of the idea was this. By way of adding to their Christmas festivities, now barely a week back, the Waybridges had imported a big box of fireworks. But they had not been used, thanks to an opportune suggestion from Harley Greenoak to the effect that, in the current state of alarm, the firing off of rockets might be misunderstood and cause a scare, under the impression that they were being sent up as signals of

distress. Now they would come in for just that very purpose.

"The idea is splendid, Mrs. Waybridge," said Dick. "Will you get them out. I can't leave my post."

"I have got them out. One minute."

She went into the other room, and immediately returned with quite a bundle of rockets, all attached ready to the sticks.

"Is Hazel all right?" he whispered eagerly.

"Yes. Elsie is watching over her. I know I would about as soon try and steal its cub from a lioness under the same circumstances," she added, with a laugh.

"And you? You are splendidly cool and plucky. What about the children? Aren't they scared?"

"They are, of course, poor chicks. But they've learnt to do as they are told. They are inside—and quite quiet."

The plan was soon formed. Dick was to go outside and stick up the rockets just in front of the stoep. None of the enemy seemed to be on that side, the ground was too open and devoid of cover in the clear moonlight. The while Mrs. Waybridge, gun in hand, would watch his present post.

"It's done," whispered Dick, returning in a minute. "There are half a dozen of them there. But before

I touch them off I've got a jolly little surprise for our friends yonder. Now look, and you'll see some fun."

Slightly opening one of the windows, with the aid of a chair he adjusted a rocket horizontally on the sill, in such wise as to rake the quince hedge, as near as he could judge, at the point whence the man who *was* a marksman had been making things lively for them. Then, striking a match, and carefully shading it, he touched the fuse.

It sputtered a moment. Then there was a deafening and appalling hiss, and a great fiery snake of sparks sped straight for the point designed, bursting with a crackling boom in among the quince hedge. The effect was ample. A hubbub of cries and shouts arose among the lurking savages, and immediately Dick had placed another rocket into position and touched it off with similar effect. Utterly panic-stricken now, the Kafirs thought of nothing but wild flight, and the crashing of their demoralized retreat through the garden was the most welcome sound the beleaguered listeners had at one time ever expected to hear again. Quick as thought Dick slipped out to the front, and applied a light to the upright rockets, one after another. Band after band of snake-red flame léapt up into the heavens, bursting with shell-like boom into beautiful blue and red and golden stars.

"There!" he said, coming back, and choking with

laughter, in sheer reaction, "I believe Jack Kafir thinks the end of the world has come, or the Police artillery—doesn't matter which. Your idea has been the saving of this camp, Mrs. Waybridge, if he doesn't get over his scare and come back."

CHAPTER XXXV

"IS IT TOO LATE?"

WAYBRIDGE, having delivered his contract stock, had intended staying the night at Fort Isiwa, but some news which was brought in at that post decided him to start for home at no longer notice than it took him to saddle up, and to get there as fast as his steed could carry him.

It was rather late when he clattered into Komgha, but, late as it was, quite a number of men were astir. There was no help for it. He must perforce off-saddle if only for a quarter of an hour, after the pace at which he had pushed his horse, and that all uphill.

"Anything in this news?" he asked eagerly as he gained the stoep at Pagel's and called for a very long brandy and soda. "Or is it all a yarn?"

"Yarn? Not much. The Gaikas have broken out, and are burning all the farms within reach. Yours among 'em, I expect, Waybridge."

"Mine among 'em! But, good Lord! man, my people are still there."

The other whistled blankly.

"Didn't they come in?" he said.

"No. We didn't believe in the scare, you see. Devil take that confounded horse of mine! I shall have to give him a few minutes more, and then I'll push him along if I kill him. Won't any of you fellows come with me? Women in danger, you know."

"Rather, I'll go," answered the man he had been talking to. Others joined, and soon a compact dozen started off to get their horses—if they could find them, and somebody else's if they couldn't—and whatever arms they happened to own.

"That you, Waybridge? Yes, it's time you started. They are beginning to send up rockets at your place." And Harley Greenoak, who had ridden up unperceived in the excitement, dismounted, and walked up the steps.

"I should think so," said Waybridge, impatiently. "By the way, Greenoak, I wish you'd sent us some sort of warning. I'd have taken it from you."

"Couldn't, earlier than this moment."

The rescue party now assembled. There were fifteen in all. But the presence of Harley Greenoak had the effect of sending up their confidence in themselves and each other. They felt as if their little force had suddenly been doubled.

"Have you been with Sandili, Greenoak?" said Waybridge, as they rode forth.

"No. With that fighting son of his, Matanzima. He's practically *baas*, and he means mischief. He'd have let me be killed, but I happened to do him an important service some time back, and whatever may be said about there being no gratitude in a Kafir, there is. I've seen it in too many instances. Look. There are no less than six places ablaze."

They were travelling at a smart canter. Glow after glow had arisen, at intervals over the dim moonlight waste. The barbarous orgy was in full swing. But no such glare hovered over the site of Waybridge's homestead. Clearly, therefore, the Gaikas had not succeeded in capturing the place. The rocket flights had now ceased.

"That young Selmes is a plucky chap," muttered Waybridge, more to himself than to the others. "It's a Godsend he should be on the place."

"He's all that," said Greenoak. "We shall find your crowd all safe, never fear."

A little more than an hour's sharp riding and they topped the last rise. There stood the homestead, white in the moonlight. An exclamation of relief escaped Waybridge. But on a nearer approach this feeling was dashed.

"There's been a fight," he said quickly. "Those are dead Kafirs, and, there are no lights showing."

The dark, motionless forms lying in front of the house, and discernible in the moonlight, told their own tale. What other motionless forms would they find within? Instinctively they put their horses at a gallop now.

"Easy, easy!" warned Greenoak; "that line of quince hedge may cover any number. We don't need to rush bang headlong into a trap."

The warning told. Wildly excited as the men were now, such was the influence of its utterer that they slackened pace. Waybridge thought he had never known what tense, poignant anxiety was until that moment.

"I'll go forward and make sure," he said thickly. "If—if—anything has happened in there—it can't matter what happens to me, and——"

He rammed the spurs into his horse's flanks. But before he had shot ahead fifty yards, a sight met his eyes—met the eyes of all of them—which caused such a wild burst of relief that it could only find vent in a ringing cheer.

Upon the stoep several figures were now standing, and prominent among them the tall form of Dick Selmes. Harley Greenoak, whose feeling of relief was certainly not inferior to that of the others, shook a disapproving head.

"We want to bring this off quietly," he said. "We don't want to let the whole Gaika nation know

we're here, and that's about what all this hullabaloo is likely to effect."

"It's all right, old chap. We'll give 'em fits if they give us the chance," said one man, airily. Him Greenoak at once set down as a fool.

They galloped up to the house, and there was a vast amount of handshaking and congratulation all round. Harley Greenoak held aloof.

"Who's on guard at the back, Dick?" he said drily, when he could get in a word.

"At the back? Oh, we don't want a guard now, old chap," was the airy response. "We've beat 'em off, made 'em run like so many curs. It was the rockets did it, and the rockets were Mrs. Waybridge's idea. But it was Elsie who generalled the whole scrap. My hat, but you should have seen her swinging that axe! She 'downed' them one after another as hard as they came in. It was fine strategy, I can tell you."

"And didn't A' tell ye that A'd mak ony sax o' yon heathen black sauvages wish they'd never been born?" said the Scotswoman, complacently. "And A' just stopped short at one."

"Well, you didn't give them time to wish they'd never been born, or anything else," answered Dick.

"Ay, but they'll be wishin' it the noo, A'm thinking," was the dry rejoinder, which, with its uncompromising Calvinism, evoked a great laugh.

"Take care that Hazel doesn't go in there, Elsie," Dick managed to whisper, referring to the kitchen, which had been the opening scene of the drama, and where lay the four bodies of those first slain by that intrepid Amazon.

The said bodies, however, were promptly dragged outside, and the sight of these, together with those lying around the house, rendered it unmistakably clear that a most gallant defence had been made. The while the feminine side of the garrison was busy getting out liquid and other refreshment for the relief party, though its consumption must of necessity be hurried, for Greenoak had advised immediate removal to the settlement, and Waybridge was already inspanning the Cape cart. Fortunately the Kafirs had not been able to get at the horses, the stable door being commanded by the firing line. And the urgency of such advice was to receive prompt confirmation.

An exploration of the garden had been judged advisable, and this, accompanied by several others, was undertaken by Greenoak. Here they found one more body—and a badly wounded Kafir. He was shot through both legs, but had managed to drag himself into cover.

"It is Kulondeka," he said, recognizing his questioner. "Then I will speak. There are several more wounded lying about—yes. The people have gone, but they will come again, with many others,

before sunrise. Take the white women and go, Kulondeka—now, at once. I know you. You and the other saved me, yonder, the day we fought Ndimba's people with sticks. Go. Lose no time."

Greenoak rejoined the others, feeling pretty anxious. They were by no means out of the wood yet. A large marauding band might appear at any moment, and, after all, their number was a mere handful. So it was with a modicum of relief that he saw the cart inspanned, and its inmates duly installed. But having seen them once started, with their escort, Greenoak slipped back to the garden with the remains of a bottle of brandy in his hand, and administered an invigorating drink to the badly wounded savage.

"Your people will find you here," he said, and the others. "Now, you have felt how hard the white man's blow can fall. Tell them."

After the peril and relief a reaction ensued.

"I suppose those horrible wretches will burn down the house," Mrs. Waybridge remarked, as they sped along. "Or, at any rate, plunder it of everything."

Hazel, for her part, thought the enemy would do both, when he saw the extent of his losses during the defence, for, of course, under the circumstances, the dead had been left just as they fell. But, not aspiring to the part of Job's comforter, she refrained from recording an opinion.

Those forming the relief party laughed good-naturedly among themselves as they noted how uncommonly close to the Cape cart Dick Selmes would persist in riding, some of the younger ones with a tinge of envy. He, for his part, was keeping up a string of lively talk and banter with its occupants, and he was doing it with an object. Hazel had shown wonderful pluck during the stirring events of the night, but the ghastly sights she had witnessed, and the terror she had undergone, would be likely to come back to her now in the reaction of feeling safe, and he wanted her to forget them. So he rattled on, keeping their attention turned in a more salutary direction; whereby shows out another side of that missing link which the girl had decided had been supplied. He had learnt to think.

The following day, and for days after, all manner of scare rumours kept coming in, of homesteads burnt, of such inmates as were unable to escape in time surprised and massacred, of stock swept away, and crops destroyed. And then the savages began to watch the main road, to cut off express-riders, or small parties; indeed, it was not long before they waxed bolder, and news came of a fierce attack upon several companies of a regiment of foot, on its march to the Komgha. To make things worse, the so-called "conquered" paramount tribe swarmed back into Gcalekaland again, joining hands with the now revolted Gaika clans within the

Colonial border. Thus the war, officially declared to be over, had, in actual fact, only just begun.

A few nights after its plucky defence, Waybridge's homestead went the way of the rest, but not before he had managed, with the aid of a few daring spirits, to make a dash out there and bring away some of the more portable effects, and to bury, or otherwise hide, others. But he did not complain. The marvellous escape of his household, where others had died cruel deaths, alone precluded that. In other ways, too, he had been lucky, in that for some time past he had gradually been selling off most of his stock, so that his loss was comparatively small.

As the days went by Dick Selmes began to look with wistful eyes at this or that commando passing through, or at this or that patrol starting to reconnoitre the countryside or keep the road open. Hazel, reading what was in his mind, was furtively watching him. One day, when they were alone together, she said—

"Dick, my darling. You are eating your heart out because you want to go off again to this wretched war, and perhaps get killed. You are not content to stay and take care of poor little me."

She had grown wondrously tender towards him since the night of peril they had shared, in pursuance whereof she had laid an embargo upon any more needless adventures on his part.

"It isn't that, sweetheart," he answered. "I'm only too happy here—with you. But I seem to be hanging back—sort of skulking—while every other fellow who can shoot straight, or not, is in the field."

She laughed softly.

"Skulking! You? Why, you've done the share of any ten men since the beginning of the war. No—no—Dick. If that's all that's troubling you, why it needn't. And now, look here, you are to go on escort duty. You are to escort me—home."

Dick's face brightened.

"But, dearest, you are forgetting," he said, with a puzzled look. "The road isn't safe yet—not by a long chalk—for you to travel under such a small escort as myself and Greenoak."

"It'll be a bigger one. The Commandant is sending a lot of Police to King Williamstown in a day or two, and he says I may travel under their escort. Will you make one of it?"

"Won't I!" he answered delightedly.

ENVOI

The partridges were lying well, springing up in fine coveys from the turnips, or from corn-sheaves on the stubble, or in twos and threes, as the coveys were broken up. A soft haze hung over the fair English landscape, with its green meadow or golden stubble and vernal woodland, the latter hardly beginning to show the gorgeous wealth of autumn colour which would soon enwrap it; for it was the Glorious First.

"By Jove, Greenoak," said Sir Anson Selmes, "we thought we'd got a few record bird-shots this side of the water. But even they don't touch you. Why, man, I don't believe you've let a bird go by this morning; all killed dead too—no runners."

The two were walking together, gun on shoulder, an old and favourite pointer of Sir Anson's trotting at their heels. The morning's shoot was over and they were making for the spot where, in the cool shade of a spreading tree, luncheon was laid out and waiting. About half a field off our friend Dick was converging on the rendezvous, with the keepers and dogs, apparently engaged in animated converse with the former.

"Oh, as to that, Sir Anson, you couldn't miss a bird with a gun like this," was the modest reply; the gun being, in fact, one of a valuable pair which had been sprung upon Harley Greenoak as a surprise present from Dick and his father conjointly.

"And as to that," rejoined the latter, "there are a good many men who'd miss a good many birds with a gun like that or any other. But how things shape themselves. When I turned the lad over to you, I knew he'd find plenty of adventure, and perhaps some risk, but the last thing I ever dreamed of him finding was a bride—and such a bride—ha-ha! And the daughter of an old brother officer of mine, at that. Why, I had almost forgotten Brandon's very existence."

"Well, when I saw how things were tending, it gave me some anxious times, I allow," said Greenoak, "recognizing that fathers are fathers, and naturally like to have a say in such matters. All the same, I tell you candidly, Sir Anson, that from the first I thought Dick would be extremely lucky if ever he managed to bring that off."

"And you thought right. Lucky dog indeed. Why, the girl is a treasure."

It was even as the old gentleman had said. He had held an Army commission in his younger days, and he and Hazel's father had been subalterns together. But the latter, tired of waiting for his step, had exchanged into a regiment ordered to the Cape on

active service, and at the close of hostilities had sold out, married, and settled down as a colonist, and a very fairly successful one he became. All this had come out in the course of Dick's engagement, and Sir Anson, delighted at the prospect of once more foregathering with his former comrade-in-arms, had concluded to take a run out and look into matters himself. His welcome had been all that he could have desired, and Hazel won the old man's heart—even as she had won that of his son—on sight. Thus everything ran on oiled wheels, culminating in a big wedding at the nearest district town, at which nothing would satisfy Dick but that Harley Greenoak should officiate as his best man. And the latter, ruefully comic over the incongruity of the *rôle* in his case, was obliged to comply.

"Hallo, dad!" now sang out Dick, as they all met at the rendezvous. "Has Greenoak been 'wiping your eye,' or is it t'other way on?"

"No, certainly not the other way on, Dick," was the answer. "Greenoak's a record. But—hasn't Hazel come yet?"

"N—no. Wait though—oh—yes. There she is. I hear wheels."

A minute later and a neat dog-cart drove up, halting at a gate on the further side of the field. Hazel had alighted before Dick could get there, and

as the pair returned together, laughing and talking, the two older men watched them, each with his own particular form of satisfaction at his heart.

"What a couple they make," said Greenoak, more to himself than to the other. But it was overheard and heartily seconded.

Hazel was looking lovely in her fresh, plain, summer costume, which set off her dark, piquante beauty to perfection.

"Good sport?" she cried merrily. "Ah, yes, rather," as her eyes fell upon the rows of "little brown birds" laid out upon the grass with a few hares and a rabbit or two. Then, still laughing and talking, she set to work, aided by Dick, to extract and lay out the contents of the hampers, and soon there was popping of champagne corks, and the glasses creamed with their fizzing contents, and all fell to with a good appetite.

"There's something very restful about this English scenery," remarked Greenoak, gazing dreamily out over the rich meadowland and soft, towering foliage, to where, away in the distance, the gables and chimneys of the Hall were irregularly glimpsed.

"Yes, and to-day might almost be an African day," said Dick. "It's so still and lovely, and cloudless."

"Oh, talking of Africa," cried Hazel, "I've just got a lot of news—mail letters—came soon after you

had started. Dick—Mr. Greenoak—what do you think? Elsie is going to be married!"

"No!" shouted Dick; and he threw back his head and roared. "Oh, that's good. Who to?"

"I don't remember the man, but he was one of the party who came to our rescue that night. He's got a farm in the Chalumna district."

"He didn't see the play she made with that axe," laughed Dick. "That might have scared him off—eh?"

"Perhaps that constituted the attraction, Dick," said Sir Anson. "Useful sort of wife to have, you know, in such a troublesome neighbourhood."

"She says that now her 'bairn' has left her—that's me," went on Hazel—"she might as well look out for herself. And so—she did."

"What a howling joke!" cried Dick. "Good old Elsie! We'll ship her out no end of a tea-service—and things—eh, dad? What other news, dear?"

"The Commandant has resigned."

"Pity. Fine old boy the Commandant. Why did he chuck?"

"He couldn't pull with the present Government. They hampered him too much."

"Beastly shame! They don't know a good man when they've got him. Who succeeds him—Chambers?"

"No, they've put in another man. Mr. Ladell has been promoted Inspector. Oh—and that man who

helped you in that absurdly foolhardy adventure, Dick —Sketchley—has been made a sergeant. That's all the F.A.M. Police news."

"That part's good, anyway. What about the Commandant? Hasn't he got anything better?"

"There's some talk of giving him Basutoland."

"Oh, well, that's not so bad. The fine old chap'll have lots of time to hunt butterflies and lizards up there."

"They say there's likely to be trouble up there," went on Hazel. "Now, Mr. Greenoak, what will South Africa do without its 'providence'?"

"Yes. I knew that," said Greenoak, ignoring the last question. "The Commandant and I have often talked it over as more than a possibility.

"Then you'll be there, old chap," cried Dick "Oh, for certain you'll be there."

"Maybe. I'm thinking of returning soon."

"Not until you've had some pheasant shooting, Greenoak," said Sir Anson. "I swear you shan't go from here till you've had some pheasant shooting, and that won't be just yet. So you're anchored for the present, you see. Now," he went on, "fill the glasses. I'm going to propose a toast. Here it is. 'All our good friends across the water, coupled with the name of Harley Greenoak.'"

The latter looked, if he could look such a thing, a trifle nervous.

"I can't make a speech, Sir Anson," he said, when they had drunk it. "Well, since I took charge of Dick there, I discovered more than once the truth of what you told me at the time. He certainly has an amazing aptitude for getting into holes, but then he manages to get himself out again." ("Or you do it for him, old chap," interrupted Dick.) "Well, then, as you have coupled your toast with the name of Harley Greenoak, I reply by proposing another toast, and that is 'Harley Greenoak's Charge.'"

"Here, Dick," said Sir Anson, "open another bottle or so, and give the men a brimming bumper apiece. They must drink this toast too. I forgot in the other case, but they can drink Greenoak's health as a toast to itself afterwards."

The keepers and watchers, who were eating their lunch under a tree a little way apart, were called up and duly supplied with the invigorating sparkle. Then the health was drunk with enthusiasm—

"Harley Greenoak's Charge!"

THE END

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